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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[AS NORA WAS DESCENDING, THE LADDER SLIPPED, AND FOR AN INSTANT SHE WAS HANGING IN MID AIR!]

ROY'S INHERITANCE.

CHAPTER IV.

"You must save her, Roy, indeed you must!" cried Lady Clavering, in a panic. "That detestable uncle of yours will be the death of that poor child. It will end in the grave, or the madhouse."

"I can't imagine what you are talking about," replied Captain Falconer with the most aggravating air of indifference; "but if it is anything to do with my uncle, I most positively decline to interfere."

"What's the use of your flirting with her the whole evening?" she said reproachfully, "if you are going to cast her off now?"

"I never heard there was any particular use in flirtation," pulling his moustaches thoughtfully; "and as to casting off, I didn't even put her into Mrs. Prinsep's carriage."

"No; that's just what I complain of; you left her entirely to that man."

"You complained just now of my flirting with her a whole evening. It seems rather

difficult to please you, Lady Clavering," with a smile.

"I didn't. Flirt with the child to your heart's content!"

"So sorry; but I didn't flirt, really, because she is such a child."

"She's no such thing. She came out to-night, and I do hope you didn't treat her too much as a child," looking up at his handsome face, as if she were mentally weighing the danger of good looks.

"Jove, I believe I did rather, but I shall never see her again."

"You will see her to-morrow as we come out of church."

"How do you know that I'm going to church?"

"I wouldn't have you for a friend if you didn't. Oh, I'm in such a state of mind, and for the first time in your life, you won't promise to help me," turning away in disgust.

"You are talking in riddles; what is it you wish me to do?"

"Say anything you like to Nora to-morrow,

only make her promise you that nothing shall induce her to go to—"

"Good bye, Lady Clavering," interposed the smooth voice of Philip Falconer; "the most successful evening I have ever had, but remember I hold you to your promise."

The Countess looked from one to the other. "I was such a fool to promise. I'm going to ask you to release me!"

"Impossible. When the matter is finally clenched the whole world may hear, but not till then."

"But if I ask you?" rather haughtily, for she was not accustomed to refusal.

"As to everything else I am your slave," with a low bow, "but as to this it is not my own affair, so I am powerless."

Then with a glance of triumph at his nephew, Philip Falconer walked off, knowing that he had made a long step that evening towards the end and object of his life.

"Good night, Captain Falconer," said the Duchess of Honiton, as she passed him on her way to the stairs. "I hope you will dream of 'innocence in white muslin.'"

"That would be safer than lying awake



over disillusion in white velvet," he answered, gravely.

"You must be changed indeed if you like the safer thing," stooping gracefully over the beautifully carved banister.

"Not changed, but more experienced," with a low bow.

She hesitated, looking down at the bouquet in her hand—a lovely bunch of pure white roses tied together with a silver ribbon.

"If I gave you a flower, how long would you keep it?"

"Till your husband came by, when I would hand it over!" looking sternly up into her lovely face.

She tossed her head and turned away, whilst he looked after her with a storm of indignation in his heart. She had killed his love when she threw him over because of his poverty, and she had nearly ruined his faith in womanhood by her speedy marriage with a man like the Duke of Honiton.

He had spoken nothing but the most honest truth when he told her that he would never descend to be her plaything, and the more she tried to win him over the more he despised her in his heart of hearts.

But surely all women need not be untrue because one was false? Surely truth looked out of the pure eyes of Nora Macdonald when she sat by his side that evening, and her little heart fluttered like a frightened bird under her satin bodice.

He took out the knot of white ribbon which she had given him and looked at it with doubtful eyes. Had she deserted him already and gone over to the enemy's side?

Rats desert a falling house, and the look was against him in every way; but a woman that was worthy of the name would only cling the closer to a fellow in trouble; and a little girl standing on the threshold of womanhood would scarcely have had time to imbibe many lessons of worldly prudence.

Instead of warning him to be careful with the child, Lady Clavering had actually enjoined him to flirt with her, though earlier in the evening she had shaken her pretty head at him, as if she were half afraid lest he were going too far.

There was some mystery behind the scenes in which Philip Falconer had a hand; and yet how could the blasé man of the world—the notorious gambler—the dissipated *roué*—have anything to do with that simple piece of innocence called Nora Macdonald?

It was a puzzle which kept him awake half the night, and he fell asleep at last to dream of the Duchess of Honiton in her dress of white velvet, with the diamonds sparkling on her haughty head, an expression of stolid triumph in her flashing eyes as she placed her foot, clad in a white slipper studded with pearls, on the pure, white throat of Nora Macdonald.

The girl's lovely eyes were raised to his in a wild appeal, and he woke, struggling desperately to free himself from some unseen toils which bound him hand and foot, and made him powerless to help her.

He woke with the perspiration standing on his forehead, his heart beating like a champion runner's after an exciting race; and, as he wondered at his own agitation, the peal of Christmas bells broke joyously on his ear.

"Peace on earth; goodwill to men."

the message brought to troubled hearts by angel-voices. But Roy Falconer told himself that there was no peace on earth, no peace with the old man who had cut him off from his rightful inheritance through an act of gross injustice! no peace with the uncle who, by treachery and stealth, would try to steal that inheritance from the legitimate heir! no peace when the woman he had loved so desperately cast him off in her mercenary carelessness, and wished to call him back to be her plaything as soon as the gold and the coronet were securely hers!

No, there was no peace on earth—and very little goodwill to man—according to Roy

Falconer's present experiences; and it was not in the brightest mood possible that he went to the village church, and joined in the Christmas services.

The Claverings sat behind a very transparent screen on the left side of the chancel—a point of vantage from which it was easy to watch the movements of their neighbours.

If he had chosen, Roy might have counted the exact number of times that the two Misses Prinsep yawned during the sermon; but he was much more interested in watching one pure, sweet face, the owner of which seemed to be engaged heart and soul in the service, without one stray thought for the people round her.

How good she looked! as if religion were a real, living thing to her simple heart, and not a mere abstraction, to be remembered only on a Sunday.

On a line with her was Philip Falconer, with an expression as if he had been dragged to church by any other motive than devotion, and by his side was the Duchess, yawning continually behind a faultlessly fitting Suite glove, and glancing covertly from under her long lashes at one tall figure in the Clavering pew.

All the inmates of the Castle pew poured down the aisle as soon as the service was over; but when the Prinseps came out after the second service they were surprised to find Mr. Philip Falconer waiting for them in the churchyard.

"I couldn't help waiting to ask how you were, Mrs. Prinsep," he said, with his blandest smile; "and to offer you all my best wishes for Christmas," his cold, gray eyes fixed on Nora's blushing face. "You must be the most delightful home in the world—to be envied of all outsiders!" with an affected sigh.

"I suppose it would be no use to ask you to come to lunch with us?" said Mrs. Prinsep, politely, wondering why this Mr. Falconer should care to be so unusually civil. Was he thinking of Mary or Jane? He had danced with both of them last night.

"May I?" he answered, eagerly. "I should only be too happy, if you give me the chance! Allow me to carry that for you," taking a small prayer-book out of Nora's unwilling fingers, as he added in a low voice, "You know what brings me to Myrtle Lodge."

She gave a look round like a frightened partridge; and the look was answered by a nod and a smile from the Countess.

Before she knew where she was she found herself in the Clavering carriage, with Captain Falconer by her side, and her poor little heart in a flutter of excitement.

Philip Falconer stood rooted to the ground for a moment in blank dismay, looking after the receding carriage with a sullen frown; and then, with presence of mind, recollected that he was bound by all the laws of politeness to be at the Castle in time for some early revels, and excused himself to the disappointed Mrs. Prinsep.

"I do believe he wouldn't come just because Nora wasn't here!" said Mary, with a frown.

"Nonsense, Mary," said Jane contemptuously. "As if he could care for a bit like that. But how she could have gone I don't know. It looks just as if she were running after Captain Falconer."

"Not a bit of it," interposed Mr. Prinsep; a grave, gentlemanly man, with a pleasant, intellectual face. "Lady Clavering has taken a fancy to her, and the girl couldn't say 'no,' without being ungracious."

"Somebody told me last night that Captain Falconer was as poor as a pauper," remarked Mary, meditatively. "If he is I don't know why he should give himself such airs."

"I don't think you can say that," and Mrs. Prinsep smiled as she thought of the evening before. "Instead of dancing with the Duchess, who couldn't keep her eyes off him, he chose little Nora for his partner."

"And I admire his taste," said Mr. Prinsep, as he opened the garden gate.

CHAPTER V.

DURING the whole luncheon, Captain Falconer devoted himself to pretty little Lady Rose Graham, the Countess's eldest daughter, a lovely child in a ruby velvet frock, with a cloud of golden hair hanging over her shoulders.

Nora was oppressed by a feeling of shyness, which kept her tongue tied, with long silken lashes drooping over blushing cheeks.

Lord Clavering, attracted by her pretty face, asked her if she weren't great chums with that nice young fellow, Jack Prinsep?

Her face lighted up at once, and she broke forth quite volubly in his praise. He was the dearest fellow on earth, and Myrtle Lodge was quite unbearable when he went back to school.

"Why didn't you bring him here, to-day?" he asked good-naturedly. "Didn't my wife ask him?"

"He wasn't there to be asked. He was cross with me, so he wouldn't come and sit in our pew, and he went off strictly the service was over."

"What was he cross about?" Captain Falconer asked, as he leaned forward from the opposite side of the table, and addressed Miss Macdonald for the first time.

It was a simple question, but it seemed to cover the girl with confusion. She bent her bright head over her plate, as she stammered,

"Cross about something last night. He thought—he said—he didn't like—oh, boys are often cross," breaking off, impatient with her own embarrassment, "and they never know what about."

"You shall tell me afterwards," he said, with a quiet smile, as Lady Clavering shot a mischievous glance across the table.

"We want to marry oo, to-morrow." It was Lady Rose who made this startling declaration, as she placed her little jammy fingers in fond affection on the young soldier's sleeve.

There was a general laugh, which did not abash her in the least, as she waited for the answer, with innocent blue eyes raised to Roy's handsome face. He looked down at her with a smile.

"You must look before you leap, little woman, or you may find yourself in a hole."

"What's that?" looking puzzled.

"You'll find yourself there if you marry a fellow without a penny."

"You haven't got a penny?" in grave concern. "Poor Roy, me give you my Tismus box," clambering on to his knee just as Lady Clavering rose from her chair.

"Me love to give it you, me's des plenty, and you shall have choc-late every day," laying her soft cheek against his bronzed one.

Lady Clavering laid her white hand on her child's yellow head, and bent over her fondly.

"Ask her not to do what that man wants!" she said in an earnest but vague whisper, and then calling to Nora to come with her, led the way into the hall.

Captain Falconer followed with Rose clinging to his hand, and, though he obediently threw himself into a lounge by Miss Macdonald's side, he could get nothing out of her.

Her small face looked as pretty as ever, with the firelight playing on her delicate features, and lighting up her gold-brown hair, but all her brightness had gone, and she was as stupid as any girl fresh from school.

She was so unutterably different only a few hours ago. Could it be Philip Falconer who had caused so complete a change?

It was just like him to throw a baleful influence over everybody he came near.

In the course of his careless, selfish life he had broken many hearts, if the stories about him were true, and, going on his way in perfect indifference, he had never stopped to mend one of them, or grieve over its fracture.

But what could he have said or done to this child in the space of one half-hour?

Roy puzzled over it whilst he seemed engrossed with Lady Rose, but he could not solve the mystery.

It baffled him completely, like a thick cloud which makes the man with the sharpest eyes, no better off than his blind companion.

He carried Lady Rose off on his shoulder to join in a game of romps, after trying in vain to draw Miss Macdonald out of her shell.

It was such up-hill work that he gave it up in despair, and walked away through the shadowy rooms, wondering why, for the present, everything seemed to turn to dust and ashes in his hands.

As soon as he was gone, Nora sat up in her chair, and clasped her hands in deep thought.

The promise she had given to Philip Falconer lay like the heaviest cannon-ball on her mind.

She had made the promise for Captain Falconer's sake, but he would never know it.

It had already estranged him from her, and his manner was quite different to what it had been last night, she thought to herself, forgetting that the change had been in her own self, and her manner had reacted inevitably on his.

The tears were already gathering in her violet eyes, when she found him standing by her in the large hall, where the shadows were deepening fast.

"Come and have a game of Blindman's Buff in the dark. They've just begun, and I know a capital place to hide in. This way."

He waited for no refusal, but led her through one room after the other, till he lifted a heavy curtain, and told her in a whisper to make herself very small and get behind it.

Then he came close beside her and let the curtain drop. To Nora's excited imagination it seemed to separate her and her companion entirely from the outer world, and her whole attention was engrossed in trying to still her heart, which was beating like a thousand hammers, and which she was desperately afraid lest he might hear.

"Tell me why Jack was cross," he said, still in a whisper, with his face very near to hers, on account of the confined space in which they were crouching.

"Oh, I don't know!" with a blush that he guessed at, but could not see.

"Don't perjure yourself; it isn't worth it. Was he jealous of anyone?"

"Perhaps; how could I tell?"

"You could tell if there was any reason for it," softly but cruelly.

He could hear a short, quick breath before the answer:

"I—I didn't dance enough with him."

"Did you dance too much with me?"

"Perhaps!" very low.

"Have you forgotten the white satin knot?"

"No!" in an agony of abyness. "Give it back to me—it was horrid of me to—offer it you!"

"No such thing. I took it, and nobody on earth—not even Jack—shall take it from me, even when it is as black as my hat!"

"But it's rubbish—and you'll laugh at it!"

"I'm not such a cold-blooded brute!" feeling his way to her small right hand, and taking it unscrupulously in his.

She tried to draw it away, but he told her in an impressive whisper to keep quite still or they would be sure to be caught.

A loud whoop coming nearer and nearer, verified his words. There was a clatter of feet—a great outcry, a suppressed giggle, and then all was quiet again.

"Captain Falconer!" timidly.

"It's Christmas Day. No surnames allowed," he said gravely. "I'm not a cool man, but you are 'Nora' to me. I couldn't call you anything else—and I'm 'Roy' to you—you know!"

"Would it make you very happy to get your inheritance back?"

"Well, it would go some way towards it. But don't let us talk of it, Nora; it's an awfully unpleasant subject," drawing his brows together. "Talk to me of something nicer—yourself, for instance."

"No, no, just tell me this," very earnestly. "Would you be grateful to anyone who gave it you?"

"Nobody could give it me but the old man at home, and he'd only be doing his duty."

"But supposing somebody could—you wouldn't be angry with her?" looking pleadingly into the face she couldn't see, except as a dim outline. "You wouldn't half-kill her by refusing?"

"I'd take it without any fuss. But, by Jove!" excitedly, "has anyone told you that the old buffer is going to marry in his dotage?"

"No, no, no—nobody's thinking of being married," with unnecessary force of conviction, as if the world in general would much prefer a whole category of funerals.

"That seems rather funny," he was just beginning, when a childish voice cried "found!" in a screech of the wildest excitement, and the two were dragged by a number of eager hands from behind the screen of the curtain.

"Me found oo!" cried Lady Rose, clapping her hands, and jumping about in her excitement. "Dive me a kiss—and kiss Nora too!"

Roy caught her up in his arms and kissed her breath away; then set her down panting and indignant. "Naughty man—meno love oo!" and she ran off after the others, eager for other victims.

"Don't go, child," and Roy put out his hand to stop her as Nora was hurrying away. "You've got a heap of things to tell me."

"Not now;" and she ran back into the hall, seized with a fresh fit of shyness, or else with a desire to avoid the topic which had just been started.

He pursued her to the large chair by the fire, in which she had ensconced herself, and leaning over the back of it, said slowly, "Who is this mysterious 'she,' who is to give me back Mountfalcon?"

"Don't ask me," starting up. "Let us have another game. Rose, where are you?" But if she hoped to escape from him—she was disappointed. He played at every game in which she joined, and wherever she went, he contrived always to be near her. She was once again the happy child of last night, and her laugh sounded joyously, as she ran down the long corridors or darted from one dusky corner to another, either in escape or pursuit.

There was a large party staying in the house, but by common consent no one interfered with these two. Nora seemed raised to a dream of rapture, as Roy drew her on by every method that he knew of. He was impelled by a wild desire to destroy his uncle's influence, and he told himself by way of excuse that he had Lady Claverling's orders to flirt. Ah, how charming he could be, the Duchess of Honiton knew who had sold him for gold and a coronet, but he was never more charming to her than he was this happy Christmas afternoon to Nora Macdonald. The unconventional games made flirtation doubly easy; but to Nora the love-making was deadly earnest. When Roy's hand gave hers a lingering clasp—when his eyes looked into hers with unutterable tenderness, her whole heart went out to him without reserve. She was exalted beyond the realms of sober reason, by the remembrance of her coming martyrdom—his misfortunes had raised him to the height of a hero of romance—and her enthusiasm had made her deaf to all instincts of prudence.

"Nora, we want on, come here," cried Lady Rose, pulling at her dress, in the imperative way of a wilful beauty, and Nora followed—after one glance thrown over her shoulder involuntarily, which acted as a magnet to a tall form leaning against the wall.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY ROSE pointed excitedly to a candle which had been fixed amongst the decorations, and turned itself topsy-turvy. Nothing would content her but that Nora should climb up a ladder and put it straight.

There were several ladders and sets of steps about, because many of the guests had been assisting in putting up the decorations, and Nora being bosom friends with a school-boy, had been taught to climb and use her legs like a boy.

Up the ladder she went without more precaution than to ask the child to hold it still, and with careful fingers adjusted the candle in its right position.

"Dood girl," cried Rose, with a nod of approval. "Me like oo next best to Roy."

Then, forgetting her allotted task, she let go, and ran off after one of her little brothers. Just as Nora was descending, the ladder slipped, and for an instant she was hanging in mid-air, between the ceiling and the floor. She felt herself going backwards helplessly, when she was caught and held firmly in somebody's arms.

"By heaven! that was a narrow escape!" exclaimed Roy Falconer, breathlessly, as he held her tight against his panting chest, and looked down into her pale face, his own as white as his collar, as the ladder fell with a thud on the ground.

An irresistible impulse seized him, he stooped his close-cropped head, and for one full minute his golden moustaches were pressed against the lips that had been so pure and fresh till he touched them.

The next instant he released her, and as she shrank, blushing, confused, and trembling against the wall, his arms dropped down by his side with a sudden feeling of remorse.

What had he done? Had he gone too far? He tried to see her face. She hid it in her hands. He went up to her, and leant against the wall by her side, wondering whether she was hurt or offended.

He knew so many women who would have laughed it off, and put up their saucy lips ready for another. But he guessed intuitively that this little girl was different to those.

Perhaps she thought him a brute, a vulgar, low, insolent brute! The thought was intolerable to him. He bit his moustaches savagely. What a fool he had been! Why couldn't he leave her alone?

At that moment he espied a bunch of mistletoe hanging from an exquisitely carved beam just above the place where the ladder had fallen. There was his excuse ready for him, and he seized it at once.

"You are not angry?" he said, with affected surprise. "If you don't want that sort of thing, you shouldn't stand straight under a bit of mistletoe. A fellow would feel such a muff if he didn't make use of it."

"I didn't see it, indeed—indeed, I didn't!" with averted eyes, but with tragic earnestness, as if she were disclaiming a treason.

"After all it wasn't wicked," a smile curling the tips of his moustaches. "Given the same circumstances, I could almost do it again."

She started away from him with such a look of horror that he burst out laughing.

There was a loud knock at the front door, followed by the entrance of Mr. Jack Prinsep, accompanied by Mr. Falconer.

Jack went up to Lady Claverling, and announced that he had come to fetch Miss Macdonald.

"And you?" asked Lady Claverling, as she shook hands with Philip Falconer.

"Won't the same reason suffice?" with his indefinable smile.

"No! you don't live at Myrtle Lodge, and how did you know she was there?"

"I thought you knew that I had a special interest in Miss Macdonald's movements," looking round to see if she were near.

"I wish to Heaven you hadn't!" exclaimed the Countess, fervently.

"I must go to Jack!" remonstrated Nora, as Roy placed himself before her.

"You shan't go to that man!" he said, excitedly. "You don't know what you are doing; you listen to him."

"Yes, I do!" with a sudden smile about her lips. "Do you think anything on earth could prevent me now? Let me pass!"

"You belonged to me first—you know you did! Didn't you swear to be my friend only last night?" looking down into her up-turned face with a masterful expression in his angry blue eyes.

"Yes; don't forget it!" joyously. "Whatever happens you are bound to be my friend."

"Then you must give up Philip Falconer. I won't share a friendship with a man I despise. Promise that you will have nothing to do with him," imperiously.

"I can't—really can't!" her head drooping, her fingers working convulsively.

"Look at me!" he said, sternly.

Slowly the long lashes were lifted, and the violet eyes looked up into his with a world of entreaty in their liquid depths he could not understand, and he was a man who hated to be puzzled. Why did she look like that when she meant to act in direct opposition to his wishes?

"Choose between us," he said, curtly.

"Don't look like that. Oh, Roy, if you only knew!" raising her clasped hands, imploringly.

"Miss Macdonald, I have come all the way round here to have the privilege of escorting you home," said the false voice of Philip Falconer. "I have the Duchesse's little cart outside, and I picked up your cousin on the way." Roy stepped back with an expression as if he had the nastiest of smells under his well-cut nose.

Nora turned to him with imploring eyes; but he only said, coldly, "Remember, I've warned you!"

It was the pain of the night before all over again, only doubly worse. His coldness seemed to cut her like a knife.

"Mayn't I tell him?" she cried, excitedly; but her appeal had no more effect on Philip Falconer than the beating of a wave against a granite rock.

"Not for the world!" he said, in a low, but very distinct voice. "You would ruin everything. In fact, I should have to stop the whole business at once and you have not come to wishing that?" his cold eyes looking straight into hers.

He was gauging the strength of her infatuation for his nephew, meaning to lead her on by the strength of that passion to a course of action which would really consummate Roy's ruin.

He had an idea that the warm-hearted, impulsive girl would be like a piece of modelling clay in his hands, and he was a man who would hesitate at nothing in order to further his own advantage.

Yes! Nora Macdonald, whilst sacrificing herself through her love for Roy, should really play into the hands of his bitterest enemy. Not a soul would be able to prevent it, for when she was once lodged within the four walls of Mountfalcon, there would be no one to raise a voice against him, or to excite the girl's suspicions.

He seemed to be apart from all the rest, as fully occupied with his almost fiendish plans, he stood in the centre of the grand old hall, amongst a crowd of happy children, surrounded by the cheerful countenances of his host and hostess, and all their Christmas guests.

"When you've done over there," cried Jack, "perhaps you'll have the goodness to come, or the governor will be in an awful wax."

Nora started as if woken from a dream.

"I'm coming; but I must fetch my hat and jacket."

"I'll send for them, my dear. Clavering, will you ring the bell? I wish I could keep you all night, but I suppose Mrs. Prinsep

would be jealous," and the Countess gave her an affectionate kiss.

"She's been away from us quite long enough," said Jack, rather fiercely, as Captain Falconer stepped forward and took the pretty little brown hat and seal-skin jacket from the maid's hands. His face was grave, his manner distant and deferential, but he helped her into her jacket, and into the dog-cart, and stood by the side of it bare-headed in the frosty air, whilst Jack looked on with jealous eyes.

Mr. Falconer got up into his place and took the reins in his hands, whilst the groom jumped up behind.

Roy gave the small fingers one long, tender squeeze, and said very gravely,—

"Good-bye!"

Through a mist of sudden tears Nora looked back and saw him still standing on the steps. A tall form, straight as a pine, the light of many lamps falling on his golden head.

It seemed as if she had said good-bye to him for ever—and with him, good-bye to youth and gladness, and all the brightness of life. A great depression came over her, and she heaved a tremendous sigh.

"Roy's a capital fellow, isn't he, for a Christmas romp?" said Philip Falconer, as they rattled at a rapid pace over the frosty road. "But it's a pity that he should spoon every girl he comes across, when he's a positive slave to the Duchesse," lowering his voice.

"I—I thought he didn't like her?" stammered Nora, confusedly.

"Then why is he going to stay there to-morrow?"

"Is he? I didn't know it."

"No, of course not. It's the last thing he would be likely to tell you."

"Why? I've only known him two days." It seemed impossible to realise it, but it was a fact that the day before yesterday she did not know such a person as Captain Falconer, and now he seemed part of her life.

"Roy can get over a girl in half-an-hour. He loves and rides away; but sometimes it's rough on the girl."

He let this speech rankle in the poor little heart beside him, and then abruptly changed the subject.

"Do you know why I took the trouble to drive you home to-night?"

"If it was a trouble I'm sorry you did it."

"The trouble was a pleasure, of course; but I never do anything without a motive. I thought it was ten chances to one that you would have changed your mind, and I hoped that the sight of me would have a bracing effect on your resolution."

"You must think me very weak."

"The weaker you are the more womanly. I love weakness in others, for your weakness is our strength. Do you call that a paradox?"

"I don't call it anything, for I can't understand it."

"I'll teach you to understand more than that some day," he said, slowly. "To-morrow I am coming to ask Mrs. Prinsep's consent to your living for one year at Mountfalcon, if you don't wish to draw back."

"No, no!" turning pale. "I've given my word, and I mean to keep it."

"Bravo! Then that nephew of mine has not done you so much harm as I thought he would. Here we are!"

The groom went to the mare's head, but Mr. Falconer did not trouble himself to get down. He shook hands with Nora before she moved, saying,—

"Good-bye till to-morrow, and after that we shall meet pretty often."

Nora drew away her hand hastily, and sprang to the ground. Without a word Jack rang the bell, for he found that the front door was locked, and stood with his hands in his pockets, moodily watching the receding dog-cart.

"Jack, are you angry with me?" said a soft voice, as a small hand pulled at his sleeve.

"Angry is not the word!" loftily. "I'm quite flabbergasted to think you could go on

with the first fellow you met, and leave me out in the cold. Not content with last night, you must go off again to have a spoon on Christmas Day!"

"It wasn't my fault, Jack, and as to spooning, it wasn't that; but I wanted to get away from Mr. Falconer," pressing close to his side.

"Honour bright?" sternly.

"Yes, honour bright," steadily.

"Then all right, old girl," and with a tear in his eye that he would not have shown for the world, the boy threw his arm round her neck, and gave her a hug as rough as a bear's.

(To be continued.)

A DESPERATE DEED.

—XX—

CHAPTER LXXVI.

"You are feeling stronger, I trust?"

The formal, icy inquiry it chilled her as no utter neglect could have done.

"Thank you, yes!"

He bowed and began busying himself with some papers on the centre table.

She turned her head languidly away, and lay cuddled down among her silk cushions on the broad lounge.

A delicious day! sweeter far in its freshness, its springtime fragrance than would be its unborn summer sisters, deep-hearted and full-blown!

If March had come in like a lion, and so it assuredly had, it was going out like the mildest, the most demure of lambs.

What a weary month it was—what an inexpressibly miserable month!

So ill had my lady been—ill almost unto death! But again, as in her girlhood, when she had prayed for his kiss, that capricious monarch had passed her by.

With the assurance of her serious sickness all her guests had gone, that is, all except Mrs. Vere, who seemed to be a fixture.

Doctor Cullen desired a consultation on her case, so they had sent to the city for a famous physician.

He came, and gave it as his opinion that her disease was rather mental than physical. He prohibited mention of any exciting topic in her presence, and enjoined absolute rest.

When he returned to town he sent down a nurse, a quiet, capable woman. She and Iva tended the invalid night and day for three tedious weeks.

What a frantic delirium was hers! They shuddered as they listened to her wild, incoherent talk—of a murdered man, of the shot which killed him; of Ivy Tower, of Geoffrey—Geoffrey! of a ghost, of a dead woman's face, of Harold!

Not once during that burning, babbling illness did the Earl enter the sick room. He was afraid to do so. He did not want to hear her crazy cries. To the others they were mere jargon. To him they would mean more than the ravings of an invalid.

So every morning and every night he made polite inquiries regarding her, but he did not ask to see her.

Lady Iva knew that something was wrong—that her father no longer loved the young wife of whom he had talked to her that day in the Belgian hospital with such impassioned affection.

Those days of tiresome attendance in a sick chamber were very trying on the girl herself.

She grew thin. Dark shadows came under those luminous violet eyes of hers. Far less seldom than of old that quick, glad, winsome smile she used to wear curved the rose-red lips.

Her father looked at her often and anxiously. How fond she was of her step-mother!

How devoted to her! But the fatigue of nursing was telling on her.

It was not all the fatigue of nursing, could he but have known.

In those days of sadness, of seclusion, she came to know her own heart. It forced her to hear its secret, so loudly it beat out in the midnight watches when all the house was still—in the chill dusk of the dawns.

At last the dragging days were done. My lady woke, sane, but weak and helpless as a little child.

To-day—the last day of March it was—the nurse had taken her up bodily and carried her down to the library.

There Lady Iva awaited her. There was the lounge heaped high with downy pillows. There was a steaming, shining urn and a salver bearing the most tempting of dainties. There a friendly little fire which crackled a welcome. There a big Nankin bowl filled with hyacinths, pink and cream and blue, shedding perfume through the room. There, best of all, the streaming amber radiance of the spring sunshine.

But the tiny creature in the loose dressing-gown scarcely saw the loving preparations for her reception, the refreshing beauty of the day.

Iva bent and kissed her, patted her pillows, and told her how pleasant it was to have her down again.

But the large grey eyes looked vainly around, then moved to the fire, and stared at it with a stullenness which only masked most bitter disappointment.

"A step—his—at last!"

She tried to sit up, but fell back.

A pitiful little spark of colour dashed out in her white cheek and died almost at birth.

She had not seen him since the night she had been stricken down—not since the moment she had cried out to him so passionately that she wished she had never looked upon his face.

How would he meet her now? Tenderly as of old, or—

Iva rose.

"I am going for a walk, little mamma."

She passed out the lower door as the Earl strode in at the upper.

The decided step paused.

Was he hesitating as to whether he should advance at all or not?

CHAPTER LXXVII.

He came slowly over to the lounge beside the hearth, looked down upon its occupant.

That Lillian?

He was really shocked by the change in her.

Her hair had been cut close; she looked woefully worn and wasted; the veins on the milk white temples were blue and distinct; the small hands looked smaller than ever and almost transparent.

But with his dismay, with his impulse of sympathy, commiseration, came the recollection of her crime.

He spoke coldly.

With all the dignity she could muster, she replied in terms just as frigid.

Then silence, intensely irritating, laden with tragedy, fell upon them.

Did he think she lied to him that night at Ivy Tower? He must, or why this studied estrangement?

Ah, it had been a long time growing! Who could tell what first had caused the "little rift within the lute?"

What had he meant by saying "a new lover?" He knew nothing of Geoffrey—at least he had known nothing, believed nothing, up to Christmas Day.

How affectionate he had been then! Never since.

And the night of that day Sir Geoffrey was killed. He had told the Earl nothing; he had had no chance to speak to him.

What if, walking in the demesne, Harold had found the revolver which she, so recklessly, so foolishly had flung aside!

The thought startled her.

But the next moment she was ready to smile at her fear.

Even so, he would never think of associating her with such a weapon, never dream that she possessed such a clumsy and repulsive toy.

No, it had not been found at all. If it had been she would certainly have heard. It had probably fallen in some hollow, some bush or clump of bushes, and there it would remain—for years, perhaps.

Closer she drew her Indian shawl about her shoulders, and snuggled down in her perfumed nest.

The rustle of the Earl's paper reached her ear.

She did not turn her head in his direction, just lay, her unnaturally bright eyes fixed full on the grate, and thought and thought.

Lionel! He was probably in prison yet, poor boy.

She must find out just when his trial was to take place. If able, she would be present. It was terribly hard he should be jailed like a common criminal for another's sin?

They could not convict him—oh, no! But if they should do so? Then she must speak. Tell the truth? Not that; she dare not do that! But concoct some plausible story—she could trust her woman's wit not to fail her.

Perjury!

Conscience, like a cruel snake, hissed the one word.

She shrank. He would not be convicted—would not need her testimony. If he were—well, yes, then! It would be, must be perjury—just that!

How warm the room was! Her eyes fairly ached from the hearth glow—she was tired.

The heavy lids drooped, lifted, drooped again—shut.

Fifteen minutes later Mrs. Vere waddled into the room.

"Lilian!"

Lord Silverdale involuntarily lifted a warning hand.

"I think she is asleep."

"That she is."

At the side of the low lounge she stood.

"She has been very ill!" in a guttural whisper.

"Yes," replied his lordship.

Soundly she slept, one delicate hand thrown upwards—a hand with a zigzag red scar across the waxen fairness of the palm.

Absently Mrs. Vere regarded the mark. When and where had she first noticed it? It was singularly familiar.

"Goodness gracious!"

The exclamation was not loud, but it was emphatic.

She sank into the nearest chair, an expression of bewilderment on her broad countenance.

His lordship glanced up.

"I can't understand it," she confided to him, still in that loud whisper. "Did you ever notice that mark on Lillian's hand?"

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

Yes, he had observed it, was the Earl's reply to Mrs. Vere.

"Well, when Marguerite came home from London with her hand—her left hand, too—tied up, we all asked her about it. The cause, she said, I think, was a bottle of scent which had broken in her grasp. Her palm was badly out. And now here is Lillian with exactly the same sort of a scar—and on her left hand, too."

Blankly the Earl stared at the old lady.

She was leaning across the table, voluble and amazed.

"I can't understand it, as I said. Those two were enough alike, Heaven knows, without going and hurting themselves in just the same way."

"Hush!"

She looked questioningly around. The little figure, half buried in the pillows, was stirring.

The Earl rose and left the room.

He felt oddly dismayed.

There was nothing strange about Mrs. Vere's discovery—decidedly not. Nevertheless it seemed to daze him.

He would go down to the smoking-room—have a cigar—get rid of mysteries for awhile. Along the passage he walked quickly.

"Hallo! I beg your pardon."

He had almost knocked down a portly individual, attired in all the noise and splendour of a new black silk, who was coming towards him.

"I ask yours, sir. Good Heavings!"

Another feminine exclamation.

Deep down in his heart I'm afraid his lordship swore. The new comer had fallen against the opposite wall in an ecstasy of recognition. Her face was that of a stranger.

The Earl paused expectantly. Clearly she was expected to speak.

She made him a bow. And she spoke.

"I was clean taken off my feet, sir, an' you must forgive my flusteration, because I never expected to see you again."

"Indeed!"

His lordship smiled.

Where had she sprung from?

"No, sir; but I allus remembered your beard and your smile."

Ah, here was a romantic mystery.

"You did! Well, that was awfully good of you! But who under the sun are you?"

A leading question, that!

The buxom dame straightened up.

"Mrs. Martin Simpson, sir."

"Well, Mrs. Martin Simpson"—with profoundly reverential enunciation—"where did you ever see me? and why do you come here?"

"I come here for a visit, seeing as I'm own first cousin to Mrs. Brown."

"The housekeeper?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"An' I seen you—your picture, rather—on the heart of a corpse."

His lordship swore—out loud this time.

But Mrs. Martin Simpson held her ground.

"Yes, sir. I keep the 'Royal Bull,' where the young lady, Miss Marguerite Woodville, died."

"Oh, you do? Well, I'm not much enlightened. What has this to do with me?"

"Nothing, sir; except that I laid her out for the dismal tomb, an' in doing so I found a locket around her neck."

"Yes."

"I opened it. I oughtn't, I suppose. The other lady—the Countess—seemed dreadful put out when I told her."

"Go on!" he cried.

"Well, there isn't any more," avowed Mrs. Martin Simpson. "The dead young lady had a locket on her heart, and the face in it was your face, as I'm a living woman."

CHAPTER LXXIX.

An April afternoon. The eve of Lionel Carzon's trial for murder. A day of grace and beauty.

All the morning it had rained, not violently, not coldly, but in soft and summery showers. Indeed, Nature had wept as just a few women can, without disfiguring her lovely face or ruffling her placid bosom.

And at noon the sun had come out and sent his beaming smile across the young green of the fields the dripping foliage of the trees, the hyacinths in my lady's garden, the little, loving primrose by the wayside.

And now, just now, as "his chariot westward rolled," some of that gracious, golden light found its way through the harsh, black bars grating a prison window.

Lionel dropped his book, turned to it as though it were a friendly human face.

The blessed sunshine! And without the sweet spring day! This to him had been always the dearest season—when all life awoke in exuberance and glow; when the fish began to leap in the stream; when the crocus held

"A tender leaning
Toward the summer's richer wealth of flowers;"

when the linnet began to sing, the apple-trees to bud, the lilacs to bloom.

He knew just how the garden at the Towers must look now. That precious old home of his; He had better not think of it at all.

He turned resolutely away from that daffodil gleam, bent his face again over his book—a changed face, but so subtly altered one could hardly tell wherein the difference lay.

Paler, of course; confinement had had its usual effect. Unsmiling? That was only natural too.

But it was neither the pallor nor the gravity which made one familiar with him look again and more intently.

An air of distrustful weariness; about the reticent, square-cut mouth a bitterness unusually foreign to it; in the dark eyes a shadow—an infinite sadness.

A key scraped in the lock. He did not even lift his head.

What mattered who came—what they said? What mattered anything, since she had failed him?

A man—tall, brown bearded, rather heavily built, a light-grey overcoat buttoned across his breast, a high, silk hat, impeccable gloves—the Earl of Silverdale.

"Lionel."

Now he looked up—nodded.

The new comer was a daily visitor.

"Any news?"

Lionel gave a short laugh, and pitched his book into the opposite corner.

"How could I hear any?"

My lord sat down on the dingy wooden table, and held his cane across his knee with both hands.

He thought that by this time to-morrow, when as now, the yellow sunset radiance would be slanting from the walls, Lionel Curzon would be either a free man, or be branded with the mark of Cain.

The same thought passed through the mind of his companion, but neither spoke.

Where had all the lad's nonchalant serenity gone? Lord Silverdale wondered.

Calm he was as ever, just as contained, but so silent, so gloomy.

Was he learning the meaning of fear? No! Lionel would never comprehend the cowardice of that word.

Was it being immured so closely, he who had been accustomed to such a supremely free and joyous life, which brought that cloud to his handsome brow?

Or was it the horror of bearing such a stigma, which was weighing him down at last?

None of these—not one.

As for the Earl himself, who shall say how that haughty heart of his was torn?

On first discovering his wife's sin he had resolved to shield her, no matter who else suffered.

A few hours later, when in her boudoir, the motive for that crime flashed upon him; then and later, when he saw her face at the casement of Ivy Tower, did he decide to mete out justice to her—justice only.

But now, when the dreaded day was almost here, recalling the girl he had loved and married, beset by tender memories of her whose head had been pillowed so often and so trustfully upon his bosom, seeing how delicate, how fragile she had grown; his heart failed him.

He had promised to love, to cherish, to protect her! How was he about to keep that vow? By turning her over to a gaping mob; by allowing her to be dragged from her proud home, from her own fireside to the gaol, the dock, the—

He could think no farther.

He leaped off the table. He commenced striding up and down the bare little room.

He would not!

He was treacherous to Lionel? Yes.

And utterly debased by his last decision? Yes, again.

And criminal himself in thus allowing an innocent man to suffer while screening the guilty? Yes, yes, yes!

All along he had told himself if he could only make up his mind finally as to the right, a certain content—peace would come to him.

He had done so. He was never more racked in spirit.

Obstinately, Lionel had refused to talk with him concerning the murder. Indeed, the subject was one the Earl himself was chary of discussing.

But even informally, casually, as he knew the accused had spoken to others, he never spoke to him.

Was it possible, could it be possible that he divined—had reason to suspect the truth?

My lord stood still.

"Lionel!"

"Well?"

He would sound him.

"I recollected just now a story of a certain young Curzon—an ancestor of yours."

"Yes," indifferently.

He was not thinking of his lordship, of the tradition referred to, nor of the probable outcome of the trial to-morrow.

He was wondering how all her days would go by—and if ever a thought, of her many, would wing its way back to him.

Meredith's aching plaint resounded through his heart and soul:

"Dying—and where is she?"

Dancing divinely perchance, or over her soft harp strings

Using the past to give pathos to the little new song she sings.

"His name was Victor Curzon," pursued his lordship. "He served in a famous battle. One of his companions, his dearest friend, committed some military offence, was sentenced to death. Your Quixotic young progenitor bribed the guards to allow him to take the place of the condemned man. In the dullness of a winter dawn he was led out—shot to death. His friend had been spirited many miles away. Not till months after, in a new and happy home, did he receive his pardon, with the story of its price. Lionel, are you doing now as he did—giving your life, perhaps, for a friend?"

The young head was upthrown. The old gay smile curved the prisoner's lips. The old quizzical laughter came back to the bold brown eyes.

"Ah, my lord, you do me too much honour! Have you forgotten the age of chivalry is past?"

The Earl drew a long, relieved breath. He had no suspicion then. All the mellow sunset shimmer was gone now. The darkness had not yet sent out its silent sentinels.

"News, Lionel!"

Neither had heard the coming footsteps.

With a bang and clatter the door was flung back.

A gentleman—an old gentleman—rushed excitedly in, up to Curzon, dealt him a kindly but staggering blow on the chest.

"Confound it, you young dog!" he shouted. "I knew you were shielding someone. But I never dreamed—I swear I didn't—that it was the Countess of Silverdale!"

CHAPTER LXXX.

LIONEL was breathless.

They had found her out. That was his first, his only thought.

My lord swung around at sound of the name uttered so triumphantly by Francis Vale.

That individual was standing, his hands on his hips, his hat on the back of his head, ex-

ultance in every wrinkle of his coat, every bristling hair in his fierce moustache.

"Lord Silverdale!"

His jaw dropped.

He had not observed the presence of the Earl when he rushed in so impetuously.

Now he was staggered at confronting him. Not afraid, not dismayed. He simply felt as any well bred man would, the delicacy of the situation in which he found himself.

His lordship bowed gravely.

A moment of silence, unbearable in its intensity.

Lionel took one step forward.

"You must be mad, Vale!" he said.

Mr. Vale's eyes snapped; so did his tongue for the matter of that.

"Am I? Well, then, certain evidence is mad, and we have a fair share of that same."

The Earl's glance was fixed on him in fever of apprehension.

But, as before, it was Curzon who spoke.

"What evidence?"

Mr. Vale took his hands off his hips, straightened his hat, and set his lips stubbornly.

"I shan't give you another chance of comparing me to a March hare, my lad. The evidence? Wait and find out!"

And with that the peppery old fellow buttoned up his coat, took off his hat in a painfully polite bow, faced around, and straight as a ramrod on wheels, strode to the door—passed out.

Lionel gave one glance toward the portal, then laughed.

"Phew! Combustible, isn't he? And yet the best of friends!"

He went over to the corner, picked up the book he had slung there, returned with it, and sat down.

Still as one of the mailed knights in his own hall, my lord stood, just as he had turned to Mr. Vale.

Lionel, lad, hoarsely, in his tone a great tenderness, "what if—that which he said—were—"

"It must be almost seven, Lord Silverdale. I know you dine at eight. And what would Mrs. Vere say if the soup were cold? Awful thought! Ride hard, your lordship, and Heaven speed you!"

He laughed again—a good, clear, ringing laugh, which showed his firm, white teeth.

He rose, and held out his hand with the unconscious princely grace which many a man had envied him.

"Good-night, my lord!"

The words were a dismissal.

In silence the Earl clasped and wrung that proffered hand, in silence went out, mounted his horse, and went homeward.

And in the cell he had quitted the lonely occupant lay prone upon the floor, his forehead pressed upon his folded arms.

Thank Heaven, he was alone again! He could not have stood it much longer.

When Vale had dashed in with that voice, word of reprieve, how his heart had bounded! But even if he could go forth to-night proven innocent—

What then?

She had doubted, condemned, forsaken him with the rest. What, after all, did the wide world hold for him after this?

Dusk crept up—crept in. The corners were full of gloom. A heavy tread—a key-click—a gleam.

Again silence. The turnkey had entered, deposited a candle on the table—gone away.

Sweet and fresh, through the grated space above, swept into the dreary room the breath of the April night.

During the afternoon, the lawyers employed by Mr. Vale had been with him. Newspaper men had presented themselves. A few old friends had sent up their cards.

The town was filled with strangers, they told him. All the hotels were crammed. The case had attracted universal attention. The trial promised to be the most interesting ever known in Sussex.

He had listened, smiled quietly, and said nothing.

Now he was not smiling. Now he lay hopeless and still, while in from off the fields that soft delicious breeze "came blowing and blowing."

So long—how long he did not know. But it seemed an hour from the time the Earl had left till the moment when he woke from his dream. A mocking and a tender dream! All of a girl with a pure, proud face, and rosy sweet lips and sunlit hair—all about the dearness of her presence, the comfort and the joy.

A cruel dream. Did he hear the rustle of a woman's gown? Did he catch a faint scent of violets?

He roused himself. Had someone really entered? He turned his head. With one bound he was on his feet. It was—it was *she*!

Just across the little room there, the flickering candle-light revealing her, slender and dark-clad, she stood.

"Lady Iva!"

He barely whispered the name.

She lifted her gloved hand, pushed her veil up over her little round hat.

In the dingy prison-cell, "star-sweet on a gloom profound," again he saw her face.

How sharp the battle she had fought with pride before she came here to-night, he would never know.

She had recalled every circumstance against him. She remembered his very question asked the morning after the discovery of the murder:

"Supposing some one you knew, some one you cared for, was suspected of having killed him, what would you think?"

All this, and more.

But he loved her. His life was in danger. And so, nerved by that divine self-sacrifice, that passionate self-surrender of which only great hearts are capable, she had come.

By love was she victoriously defeated. The prisoner did not move, but he looked at her as those long blind may at their dearest when at length they see.

She was very pale. Ah, his quick eye noted all change! Like one of her own snow-drops, so similarly blooming now, was that fair cheek of hers.

There were traces of tears upon it, too. More lustrous for their late dew, those brave and beautiful eyes.

She tried to speak. No words came.

He placed her a chair.

"Sit down," gently: "you are tired."

She remained standing.

All his being was filled with the gladness of her presence, vibrant with exultation. But even if "his lips were close to her golden head," he would not move until he knew her will.

"I came to tell you—to tell you before to-morrow—"

The thrilling, tender, proud, pathetic voice. He stepped on toward it, still with outstretched arms, as if to quench upon his breast that voice.

She ceased. Her lips would quiver so!

A sudden bitter thought dawned upon him. "To tell me you forgive me, or pity me?"

It was said!

She started as if struck. Over that shy, courageous, blush-rose face of hers a carmine glow came sweeping.

"Neither."

Very low, but he heard.

He came nearer.

"What then?"

He was merciless.

"This, Lionel—only—that I love you!"

CHAPTER LXXXI.

WHAT evidence?

That was the query which maddened my lord as he rode furiously home through the clear, blue April gloaming.

Was it of any importance, or had they

magnified some trivial clue? How in the name of Heaven had they come to fasten suspicion on her?

One thing was certain—Lillian must not be allowed to attend the trial to-morrow. Heaven only knew what might transpire, come to light.

He turned in at his gates. A broad-backed woman, in a black shawl, was passing out. She ducked him a respectful courtesy.

He nodded carelessly.

Mrs. Brown? No. He remembered now—the person who had startled him so in the corridor a couple of weeks ago—Mrs. Martin Simpson.

He had not given her unpleasant recognition a thought since.

Lillian had allowed her sister to wear the locket he had given her. That was hardly in the best taste. But *bah!* why stop to count straws now when a life hung in the balance?

Home!

He leaped off; a groom led Molly Bawn away. He ascended the steps, passed along the wide stone balcony, sweeping around the library windows.

At one he paused—a long, French window—the crystal doors of which stood ajar.

Softly in the night breeze the curtains fluttered.

Within, the high-pedestaled lamps at either side of the mantel burned mellowly under their jewelled shades; and directly below one, swaying softly back and forth in a pretty, low rocking-chair of bent wood and plush, my lady.

My lady, with her fair, idle hands clasped behind her dark, cropped head, and a far-away, almost ethereal, look on that little, child-like face of hers.

She did not look like a murderess, the Earl thought, with a sudden throb of compassion. Poor little creature!

But he crushed down the kindly impulse, went in.

She looked up at him. There was no kiss of meeting, no fond word as of old. Strangers would have shown more cordiality than he and she.

When others were present,

"Nothing was to see

But calm and concord. Where a speech was due, There came the speech; when smiles were wanted, too, Smiles were as ready."

But alone! Then it was different.

"I have been with Lionel," he began, abruptly.

She slightly inclined her head.

"And I wish to say to you now that I do not consider it proper you should attend the trial to-morrow."

Stiffly put, but he felt ill at ease.

"I am sorry"—very quietly—"to differ from you. I am going."

She had not changed her attitude, just spoken with that unemotional decision.

"You must not, you are far too weak yet. The crash, the excitement—you could not stand them."

He was positively pleading with her.

"I am going!" just as gently as before.

How stubborn she was!

His lordship flushed angrily. To what was she not bent on exposing herself—to what odium, what direct indignity?

"You shall not!"

There was temper enough in his speech.

Her chair kept up its even rocking.

"I shall!"

The Earl clenched his hands.

He was defied.

"Do you know," standing, actually towering over her, with crimson brow and heaving breast, "do you know what they are saying?"

He was terribly in earnest.

She ceased rocking.

"What?" breathlessly.

Did she surmise? her calm was broken.

"That you," grinding out the words between

his tight-set teeth, "that you murdered Sir Geoffrey Damyn!"

"I?"

She leaped to her feet. She poised quivering before him.

"I?" she repeated.

Loudly in the silence ticked the clock on the mantel.

There was no mistaking that face, that cry of horror.

"There is peace so calm and bitter that one almost longs for strife." Such a peace fell upon them now.

He turned from her.

She stood quite still—and thought.

She would go to-morrow as she had intended. She would tell them how she had stolen out on Christmas night—with what purpose. Tell, too, how Damyn was shot dead before Lionel came in sight.

A sickening silence.

My lord could bear it no longer.

He wheeled around.

"Well," huskily, "what have you to say?"

My lady answered,—

"Nothing!"

CHAPTER LXXXII.

"CALL Rick Pollen!"

My Lord of Silverdale half leaped from his seat. All along he had controlled himself with a will of iron; but this blow was so totally unexpected, it cut him like a sudden stab.

He sank back.

The trial progressed.

A famous trial indeed!

For a couple of days the incoming trains had disgorged curious crowds at the Rothlyn depot. The village was full to overflowing.

The court, which was the principal one of the new assize courts, was literally packed—but packed with no common assemblage.

The crime was presumably committed by an aristocrat. The murdered man had been a baronet, his host one of the peers of England. So men of their own order flocked down to this hitherto quiet town, and formed solid and distinguished phalanxes in the court where the trial was in progress.

There, to be sure, were nearly all the guests who had spent Christmas at the Castle; there, too, the Earl and Countess of Silverdale and Lady Iva Romaine.

Every inch of standing-room was taken—dead silence reigned—when the court opened and the prisoner was brought in and placed in the dock.

Then a faint murmur rippled around the hall.

He did not seem anxious, nor yet indifferent.

Tall, dashing, handsome, he looked straight down on the upturned faces below, as he took his seat in the dock.

There was no sadness, no weariness in that look now. The high-born young face was serene as the sunny April day. A tender, half-repressed delight lit to a new, a softer, beauty those unflinching and dauntless eyes.

He bowed to those who sent him dumb greeting—but absently.

Where was she?

Ah, he saw her! There, sitting next her father, who, bolt upright, with grim brows and folded arms, looked straight ahead. There his loyal love—his true sweetheart!

Dressed all in silvery grey, a small velvet bonnet framing in most charmingly the soft, loose curls; a knot of violets at her breast; a drift of peachy bloom in her cheeks; a vagrant smile tremulous on her lips.

Their glances met.

He bowed reverently.

Could that be the Countess? How she had changed!

Every vestige of her youth, her beauty, seemed to have fled.

Was remorse the cause? he marvelled, vaguely; or her severe illness?

Then he faced the judge. The counsel for the crown had opened the case.

Quite a formidable array appeared the facts presented.

All the evidence obtained at the inquest was reviewed. The hesitation and confusion of the accused when asked by the Earl if the case was one of suicide; the well-known animosity existing between the young men; the cat's-eye caught in the clothes of the deceased; the few hairs which had been proven in hue and texture to match the prisoner's; the threat of Christmas Eve. A handkerchief, too, had been procured from a servant of the accused; a handkerchief—here the learned gentleman lowered his voice mysteriously—on which blood-stained fingers had been wiped. The court would prove it had been discarded in his room, at the Towers, the day after Christmas.

This, a witness proved.

Indeed, the crown brought forward quite an array of witnesses.

Even the Earl was obliged to go into the box. He had passed a sleepless night—a night of misery. He was wholly unfitted for the ordeal.

Grimly and briefly he responded to the questions asked.

He had heard the threat? Yes. Was not Sir Geoffrey a suitor for his daughter's hand? Yes. The deceased had mentioned the hour he would return from Rothlyn? Yes. Had the prisoner about that hour left his house? Yes.

That was all.

His lordship stepped down.

Another man took his place.

Laborious were the efforts of the prosecution.

The court rose for luncheon.

Resuming, the thread was taken up where dropped.

It was almost three o'clock before the case for the crown ended, and the defence was begun.

The chief counsel for the prisoner was one of the most distinguished advocates of the criminal bar, and his junior also had already made a name in the profession. The opening was calm but confident. Mr. Melrose, Q.C., commenced by dilating upon the terrible nature of the crime, and then reminded the jury that they had heard the prisoner plead "Not guilty." His learned friend and himself, he said, would endeavour to sustain and establish that plea.

The crowd settled itself eagerly to listen, perhaps the trio from the Castle the most absorbed of them all.

Since the commencement of the proceedings they had not risen.

Friends had pressed around at recess, urging them to go out to luncheon.

But they had declined. They were too anxious about the result; they could not eat.

But the Marquis, who still lingered in Sussex, slipped away and came back with claret and sandwiches.

They really must have some refreshments! So, to please him, and in gratitude, they pretended to eat and drink.

A very silent party. Duskily robed, marble still and marble pale, my lady sat. The Earl was nervous, as he never had been before in all his varied, travelled life.

And Lady Iva? She had not the intense and guilty dread of the others to crush her. But she loved him. And she was most deeply, most thrillingly, anxious.

Outside was a delightful day, blue-skied and sunny, with the scent of all the Rothlyn gardens burdening the frolicking April breeze; inside that dense concourse sat in the stillness of intense interest.

"We have considered," concluded the eloquent leader for the defendant—"we have been impressed with the conviction that the evidence of our client, which has been so severely commented upon, was but an honourable reserve on his part, assumed for the purpose of shielding the real criminal. How

far our surmises were correct will be proved by our first witness. Call Rick Pollen!"

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

RICK POLLEN!

To the majority of those present the name was unknown. They could not recollect having come across it in the published accounts of the case.

But the Earl of Silverdale recognised it, and half leaped erect.

To the prisoner also was the homely cognomen familiar.

But was it Rick Pollen? Was that the slouching young clothopper, in tan-coloured corduroy, who had presented himself to my lord on the morning following the murder—that spruce individual in the checked suit, the massive chain, the scarlet and blue tie, the obliquely high collar?

Yes, there was no doubting the ownership of that carotid countenance, that shock head which all the maoassar ever sold would be powerless to subdue.

Being sworn, after one scared and sidelong look at the Earl, he began his testimony.

An amazing story!

Early on the morning of the twenty-sixth of December last, crossing the demesne to the stables, where he had a promise of work, he had seen something shivering, half in, half out, of a snowdrift. Picked it up. It was a revolver.

Sensation.

Cross-questioned. Was he aware of the fact of murder before discovering the weapon?

Yes. His sister had been ill. He had walked into Rothlyn for the doctor early that morning. Had met one of the grooms from the Castle, who told him the news.

Continuing, he declared he had seen the Earl and delivered the revolver to him. The latter had given him fifty pounds to hold his tongue about the business and go to America.

Such a rustle as there was in Court!

This evidence was astounding—incredible.

Every eye turned on Lord Silverdale.

Sullenly, silently he sat between his wife and daughter.

What had my lord done with the weapon? Looked it in a desk.

Half-relieved, half-shocked, Lionel bent forward—listened.

And Mr. Francis Vale stole a look at him from under his bristling brows, and let a slow, exultant smile grow upon his mouth.

Could that chivalrous and foolish boy call him mad now?

Was anyone else in the room at the time the Earl accepted the weapon—paid him?

Yes.

Yes! His lordship started sharply.

There was not! The lad was lying!

Anyone now present?

Slowly, from one countenance to another, the round eyes of the witness travelled. Suddenly they stopped—arrested.

His arm sprung straight out from his shoulder. His red forefinger pointed directly at the prisoner.

"Him!"

Electrically effective that solitary, ungrammatical word.

Through the long court a surging murmur ran. Every neck craned forward. Every heart beat harder.

Here was a new complication!

Outwardly stone my lady sat.

The Earl leaned towards the witness with the rest, the veins on his forehead purple and swollen.

With kindling cheeks and puzzled, shining eyes, Lady Iva put all the strength of her soul into simply hearing—comprehending.

Was the witness sure?

Just as sure as he was that he himself was talking. He did not think the Earl knew the other gentleman was there.

Asked to explain, he averred that in following his lordship out of the apartment, they

had passed "a kind of holler in the wall, with curtains before it." He had looked in. The prisoner was in there, sitting on a sofa, looking wild and queer-like.

Lionel had known all along, then, and his silence was to screen her.

Those two thoughts crashed through the Earl's brain.

A few more questions—cross-questions.

The witness was allowed to stand down.

The next name called was—

"Jane Carter!"

My lady's own maid! Had she been tampered with—bought?

A brisk, middle-aged woman. She rose, took the stand.

Her story was told with an abundance of conscientious detail.

The Countess of Silverdale had taken her into service last October. Christmas night she was not rung for by her ladyship till quite awhile after midnight.

How long? She could not tell, but they had become aware of the murder in the servant's hall, where their regular Christmas ball was being held, before she was summoned.

His lordship was leaving the room as she entered. My lady was shaking all over. Her slippers and the edge of her gown were wet through; her cloak, lying over the back of a chair in her bedroom, was all crusted about the bottom with half-melted snow.

When first questioned she had told the gentleman she knew nothing. Later, her conscience troubled her. The fact that the Countess had been out the night of the murder might be of importance. So she had come to town and found Mr. Carzon's lawyer, and told him about it—that was all.

It was four o'clock now. The sun, slanting westward, sent through the window one long beam of light—a dancing, powdery bar of gold.

Not for an instant did the fascinated attention of the great audience avert, flag.

The case had developed new elements of interest.

They would produce no other witnesses, the leading counsel for the defence declared. But he would, if permitted, group in one brief argument his reasons why the intelligent gentlemen of the jury should release, in all honour and justice, the prisoner at the bar.

At the inquest it had been proved as it was also to-day, that on Christmas night Sir Geoffrey Damyn had ridden into Rothlyn and written a despatch demanding a copy of his marriage papers. His marriage to whom? To Marguerite Woodville sister of the Countess of Silverdale, who had died seven months ago—three months before that date.

Very well. His lordship had said, during the first inquiry (this also had been admitted), that his wife had doubted the legality of the ceremony between the deceased and her sister. That was the reason he had written to his lawyer for the most convincing of proof regarding it.

Very well again. Her ladyship had been out in the snow the night of the murder—

Here the prosecuting council objected.

His learned friend was not dealing with the evidence. They were trying the prisoner at the bar—not the noble lady whose name had been so ruthlessly dragged into the unfortunate affair.

But, came the reply, they were only endeavouring to convince the jury that by the stubborn silence the accused had steadily maintained since his arrest, he was guarding another. They must, to clear him, make patent the fact there was another person to screen; and how he became aware of that person's guilt.

He then resumed:

It had been proved that the Countess of Silverdale was out the night of the murder—that she cherished doubt concerning the conduct of the deceased towards her sister—that the Earl had bribed to silence and banishment the youth who had bought him the re-

volver—that the prisoner, himself unseen by his host, had overheard the dialogue.

What more probable than that, actuated by a romantic impulse, he had resolved to suppress his strangely-acquired knowledge?

He was young, generous, impulsive, chivalrous, recklessly Quixotic if you will. He could not vindicate himself without criminating a friend. So he simply remained silent.

He had as far as possible refrained from unjust insinuations.

A separate research must decide the late suspicion. He had merely presented a motive for the apparent apathy of his client. He would now leave it to his learned friend to reply.

But his learned friend did not.

There was a stir—a whisper—a buzz.

My lady had risen.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

"The Countess!"

The words were on every lip.

"Order in the Court!"

A deathly silence succeeded the first tumult of surprise.

Instinctively, as she rose, the Earl put out his hand as though he would force her back. As quickly he withdrew it.

Let her have her say, he resolved mentally. The suspicion of every creature in the Court had by this time befouled her. Let her speak! There was nothing she could say would condemn her more effectually than the fever of doubt rampant against her had done—must do!

"Little mamma!"

She did not seem to hear Iva's soft cry.

Small, wan-visaged, shadowy-eyed, she faced the bench.

"If the court please," her voice fell and rich as ever, "I demand to be sworn."

"You have evidence to offer in this case?"

"I have evidence."

A short consultation between his lordship and the gentlemen of the long robe.

Then the decree was spoken:—

"Let the lady be sworn."

It was the nobleman from Wales who instantly rose and presented his arm.

As courteously as he would have led her in to dinner, he escorted her to the tribunal—to the witness-box.

Oh, that awful sea of faces! Oh, those hundreds of curious, staring eyes—they seemed to gilet her! How merciless they looked!

For just a second she shrank. Then she took the oath required—spoke.

And save for those unfaltering tones, there was no faintest sound in all that huge and crowded room.

"On Christmas night I was very despondent—for reasons having no bearing upon the case in question. Trouble of a purely domestic nature menaced me. I thought till I was half crazed. I could find only one way out. That way I resolved to take. I stole away to my room. I took from a drawer a revolver I had possessed for some months."

Was this a confession?

How they bent toward the speaker—that intent and breathless assemblage? How they swallowed every syllable.

The Earl's face was drooped upon his hand. But Lady Iva, her dark brows knit into an arch of bewilderment, sat attentive—dis-mayed.

"I had made up my mind to kill myself!"

Herself!

How, then, had her bullet struck Damyn?

For surely she was guilty.

A reversal of opinion, a fierce and strong flood-tide had set in.

"I went out—down the avenue—"

She paused.

If they should ask her why!

A voice did.

(To be continued.)

EILEEN'S ROMANCE.

—X—

CHAPTER XIV.

ADAM GOLDSMITH left England with a light heart. True, he had before him a task of great difficulty; but had he not also the reward of May's approval to spur him on? Would it not have made more difficult things seem easy to him, to know that he, a plain, dull, middle-aged man, the wrong side of forty, had won the treasure coveted by the most eligible suitors in England—the priceless gift of May Delaval's love.

He had never even hoped for it. It had seemed to him his sad secret raised an impassable barrier between him and the one woman he cared for. He had never dreamed that an Earl's daughter would be content—aye, and pleased—to marry a man, who in the eyes of the law, had no real name of his own; but then May Delaval was not as other girls were, she was nobler and larger souled than most of fashion's daughters.

She had a heart, and having found that it had passed from her into Adam Goldsmith's keeping, she was too true to prevent her hand from following.

Adam knew that Lord Vivian was very fond of his nephew. That he regarded Basil Courtenay as one of whom any father might be proud. It seemed to the banker May's generous proposal would please all parties.

The Earl would have an heir after his own heart, and if Basil took his uncle's name the Delavals of Yorkshire would not be extinct.

Sir Bryan and his wife must be well content at the splendid position offered to their firstborn; while the girl, who voluntarily resigned her birthright and put another in her place, had told him she needed nothing but his love to make her happy. Indeed, the future looked fair enough. His own enormous wealth would have surrounded May with every luxury had she come to him penniless; but her godfather's legacy, which she must still retain, was in itself a fortune. No wonder the future looked fair to Adam as he journeyed to Africa.

Disappointment awaited him. He soon fell in with an old acquaintance, who told him Cyril Westwood had left the place after a very brief sojourn and gone to the south of France; he meant to travel from one health resort to another, and might even go for a cruise with a friend whose yacht lay off Marseilles, and who talked of sailing to Australia.

"Surely he was not ill!" observed Adam, gravely; "he seemed to me in perfect health. Why should he want to make a tour of foreign health resorts?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"He looked well enough; but I'll tell you one thing ailed him, Goldsmith, his temper. I never saw a fellow so miserably changed. He could hardly be with you for two minutes without snapping your head off. I was very glad, for my part, when he took his departure."

The banker travelled back to Marseilles. Here letters reached him from May Delaval. He had heard from her before, for more than a week had passed since he left England before he fell in with his talkative acquaintance, and so left Algiers; but this letter struck him with a strange fear.

May had lost her bright hopefulness. She wrote evidently in bad spirits, and seemed out of gear.

Dorothy was no better. The quiet of Vivian Court had produced no favourable change. She grew paler and thinner day by day, and May trembled for the result if help did not soon come.

"She is still under that hateful power," wrote Adam's fiancée; "by night she cannot rest, but seems always imploring mercy of some unseen tyrant, while by day she is just a frail, shadowy little creature whom one fears a rough breeze might blow away. I can see no

hope. Dr. Macdonald has been down, and seems anxious about her. He says something must be done soon or she will die. To my mind there is but one thing to do. To break the awful spell; but how to set about it I cannot tell. And I am troubled about other things."

"Basil, whom I deemed the soul of truth and honour. Basil, whom I trusted as myself, instead of being true to my poor little Eileen has engaged himself to a Blackshire heiress, and my little friend is dying. I cannot go to her. I actually dare not leave Dorothy unprotected, lest by some strange chance Maude Desmond, should appear in my absence; but I feel torn in pieces."

"If Eileen dies I shall always feel we have killed her. It was I who brought her from her happy, safe obscurity, and threw her into Basil's society. When I think of Dorothy lying here as it were fading away through a cruel treachery, and Eileen dying of a broken heart, it seems to me there must be something terribly wrong somewhere in this life of ours that such things can be."

The letter ended with a few affectionate words to himself—words of gratitude for his love, and for the search he was even then conducting.

The letter had certainly troubled May's ambassador, but it had done something else. It had made his course quite clear.

Cyril Westwood once found, there must be no dallying, no ceremonious delay; whatever the consequences, he must go straight to the point at once.

He had got thus far in his musings when the waiter opened the door of his private sitting room, and presented him with a card.

It seemed to Adam fate itself must be interfering in Dorothy's favour. Here was the name of the very man he had come to seek. Cyril Westwood was actually calling on him.

He came in with a worn, jaded look on his face, as one who had traversed many miles, and wearied himself in journeying without deriving exercise, pleasure, or benefit. Thinner and graver than when Goldsmith had seen him last, and with a strange, hopeless look in his eyes, as though nothing could make him glad or sorry.

"I knew you were stopping here," he said, when the first greetings had been exchanged. "so I thought I would look you up. I don't suppose you'll stay long; there's nothing worth looking at. I leave myself to-morrow."

"Where are you going?"

"New Zealand, India, anywhere—it doesn't matter! I've hired a yacht, and mean to cruise about. I suppose it's no use asking you to join me?"

"No. I must return to England as soon as possible. I want to persuade you to come with me?"

Westwood shook his head with a sneer.

"No use, my good fellow! England and I have parted company for a good while to come. I think, myself, our native land vastly overpraised. What has she to offer us but worn-out traditions, phantom fortunes, and women false as a poet's dream?"

"I can't allow that last! I am engaged to be married. It's a secret as yet, but I don't mind telling you. My fiancée is one of the truest hearts Heaven ever made, and for her sake I won't hear you speak against her sex!"

"You are richer than most men, so it's likely she'll keep her word," said Westwood, bitterly; "but it will be your gold that keeps her faithful, nothing else, depend upon it. And so you're going home to be married. Is the day fixed?"

"I have not even spoken to her father yet."

"My dear fellow, you aren't doing things at all in an orthodox manner, I can tell you that. If you must come touring over Europe just after arranging to be a benedict, let me inform you you ought to have settled everything in due form first. Pin-money, jointure, wedding day, honeymoon, route. So much you

should have got all out and dried; then, if you chose to run over here while your bride-elect was busy with the milliners, &c., no one could blame you."

"As it happens, I am here at her request. When I asked May Delaval to be my wife, I undertook a mission she could not execute herself; and we both understood that till it was fulfilled our own future must not be discussed or thought of."

"May Delaval!" Westwood's tone had grown a little less cynical. "Well, I don't think you've done badly after all! She has opinions of her own, and is a trifle masterful; but I begin to think women with masculine brains are more to be trusted than those sweet, childish-looking creatures we worship blindly till, like cats, they unsheath their claws and wound us."

"I am much obliged for your good opinion of my choice. I do not think my fiancée masculine. I can only tell you I am counting the hours until I can get back to her!"

"Then why in the world don't you go?"

"I shall not go to May until I can tell her I have fulfilled her trust. I am not going to prove myself unable to perform the only thing she ever asked me to do!"

"What was it?" asked Westwood, carelessly. "I don't think she cares for pearls; and she does not go in for botany or collecting rare animals. What remarkable thing was it you promised to take back to her?"

"Cyril Westwood!"

The person spoken to looked so bewildered, that Adam Goldsmith hurried on:

"I cannot help it, even if I offend you; if I appear to you both interfering and presumptuous. I left England in search of you. I was directed here from Algiers, but could find no trace of you. I was well-nigh in despair when your card was brought to me."

"I have only seen your fiancée once," said Westwood, slowly. "What could she want me for?"

"If only the case were not so urgent," said the older man, "I would never have burst on you with my request in this strange manner; but every day, nay, every hour, is of consequence. One whom May Delaval loves as a sister, lays dying! It seems to us—to May and myself—that you might save her!"

He was not prepared for the effect of his words; strong man as he was, Cyril Westwood staggered, and would have fallen had he not clutched wildly at the table for support.

"Dying?"

"We fear so!" Then, though he knew the words were unnecessary, "I speak of Dorothy Courtenay."

"She deserves it!" broke from Westwood, impatiently. "Did she not win my heart and toss it away like a broken toy? but dying! Dolly dying? Why, I would give my life for her!"

"We cannot start before to-night's train," said Goldsmith, quietly. "Even if you consent to accompany me, there must be so much delay. Westwood, don't think me inquisitive, more depends on it than you know. I want you to tell me what separated you from Dorothy Courtenay?"

"What separated us?" cried Cyril, wildly. "Her own deed of course. I had loved her all her life. I was but waiting an opportunity to ask her to be my wife, when the night of her sister's wedding-day, I had a note from her, telling me not to think any more of our childish intimacy (childish, indeed! I am nearly thirty), she could never be mine, her heart had been won by a nobler suitor, and I must think of her only as my little friend!"

"When did she give you this letter?"

"I found it on my dressing table when I went to bed. Dorothy herself had retired early on the plea of a headache."

"And you believed it?"

"Of course I believed it. I had known Dorothy's writing from her childhood, had seen it in all its changes. It is a peculiar hand, one that it would be impossible to imitate. I

know even if they had had any object in the forgery, no human creature but Dorothy Courtenay could have written the letter I received."

Everything was clear to Adam Goldsmith.

"And you even think Miss Courtenay possessed of a strong will?"

"It's no use your pretending she was made to write that letter," said Cyril, decidedly. "Her parents were on my side."

"She was made to write it, poor child!" said Adam, speaking with great feeling. "Made to write it by a power so unscrupulous and so cruel that while her hand traced every word of the letter that hurt you, she had not the faintest idea of their purport!"

Westwood looked incredulous.

"I don't believe it!"

"Softly! I must tell you the truth, but forgive me if I wound you in the telling. You have a cousin, Maude Desmond, whose home for years has been chiefly with your mother. Had you any idea how these ladies spent their time in London?"

"I never visited them there. Stay though, I called once in Brompton, but I have no special remembrance of it."

"Mrs. Westwood and her niece—though I believe not in their own names—have for years earned a handsome income by their mesmeric cures. Their fees are enormous, and so highly trained are their powers in this strange and mysterious science that at times they have relieved patients who had been years under the ablest physicians. The gift seems to have been hereditary among the females of your mother's family."

Cyril groaned.

"That was what my father meant then when he thanked God he had no daughter, when, child as I was at the time of his death, he warned me with his last breath never to marry my cousin Maude."

"Don't you see, Westwood, the power employed for evil might, in unscrupulous hands, have fearful results. Miss Desmond meant to marry you, so—"

"I never in my life gave her cause to think I cared for her other than as for a sister."

"That makes no difference. She cared for you. That poor child at Courtenay Hall stood between you. If only she could bring about a misunderstanding between you and Miss Courtenay before you were definitely engaged, when the poor child would be powerless to demand an explanation, the game was won."

"It is a terrible charge," said Westwood slowly; "besides, how do you explain that letter? I would give worlds to believe Dorothy did not write it, but I tell you every word is her own!"

"Dorothy wrote it!" said Adam gravely; "but when she wrote it, she was so completely a victim to hypnotism that her hand traced whatever your cousin commanded, without her intellect grasping what she wrote."

"And what is hypnotism?"

"It is one will so completely paralysed by the force of a stronger will, that the poor victim is utterly unconscious of all that happens."

"But tails is terrible!"

"There have been cases known," went on Goldsmith pitilessly, "of murders committed in this state, and of suicide; the power once established it is almost impossible to break."

"But how did you suspect it?"

"After you had left Courtenay Hall with such scant courtesy, Miss Desmond became a guest there. She infatuated the whole family except Basil and his cousin, Dorothy in particular seemed marvellously taken with her; but as the days wore on the girl's health began to fail. She grew thin and pale, was always tired, and yet when questioned, declared she slept soundly the whole night through. She seemed to her cousin, though still much with Miss Desmond, to have acquired a nameless fear of her. It was a terrible time for May; her uncle and aunt believing their child was pining at your desertion, and their pride in

arms, would not see how ill she was. And at last Lady May took the matter into her own hands, and carried off her cousin while the family were absent at some festive gathering."

"I met them at Waterloo, and I was horrified at the sight of Miss Courtenay. I had expected to meet a beautiful girl in the pride of youth and health. I saw a feeble fragile creature, who seemed to me smitten by some dire disease. That very night her cousin told me all. Her fears had not then taken a very distinct shape; but she believed Miss Desmond had gained such an influence over Dorothy that the poor girl was actually afraid of her. She asked me could such things be? I told her there was no limiting the influence of mesmerism. Lord Vivian is an old College friend of my own. Entrusted by Lady May with the task of telling him my fears, I found he had been converted from his scepticism of mesmerism by the evidence of some wonderful cures worked by two ladies well known to him. He did not then mention their names. That very night both May Delaval and an old nurse kept watch, and they found poor Dorothy talking in her sleep, and imploring some unseen person to give her back a letter. The case is quite clear to me; by day the poor child knows nothing save that you have forsaken her; but at night a vague memory comes to her of writing something which she connects in some way with your estrangement. She seems to see her tyrant, and implore her to give back the paper. Maedonald, who is one of the most skilful men I know, declares that unless the strain on her brain is removed he will not answer for her life, and declares he cannot go to Maude Desmond and charge her with her perfidy. He has no proof a lawyer would accept. Besides Dorothy is still under her influence. For the child's own sake we can do nothing against her tyrant till the spell is broken."

Cyril Westwood trembled.

"Can anything break the spell against her—Miss Desmond's—will?"

"Only two things: death, which would give, of course, freedom to her victim; or the introduction of a stronger influence. We both believe, May Delaval and myself, that love for you is the master passion of Dorothy Courtenay's life; we believe that your voice, and yours alone, could break the bonds that hold her, and restore her to herself. But, Mr. Westwood, she shall not be called back as it were from the brink of the grave, only to endure more sufferings. Unless you are willing to accept our theory of the letter in her hand writing, and will cherish her all her days, do not come to the Court with me. Better that the poor child should sink into an early grave than that she should recover to face again the cruel coldness and bitter neglect which first shattered her health."

"And you could think that of me?"

"I do not want to be hard on you," replied the banker; "but remember I have seen her, I know in a measure what she has suffered, and I will not be the means of taking you to her, unless I feel you will be true to her."

"I was never anything else," said Westwood, brokenly; "even when I thought her false, I loved her. Mr. Goldsmith, only take me to Dorothy, and rest assured I will never leave her; I will stay at Vivian Court until she can leave it as my wife, or," and his voice quivered, "until they take all that is mortal of her from me, to put it to rest in the silence of the grave. But oh, to think of what she has suffered, to remember how I have been tricked? I tell you, when I think of Maude Desmond's part in it, I almost forget she is a woman in my longing for vengeance on her."

"Hush!" said the man whose youth had been crushed and disciplined by a secret sorrow. "Do not speak of vengeance; pray rather that we may get there in time."

"Is it so bad as that?"

Goldsmith shook his head.

"May wrote of her cousin as 'much worse.' If you had seen her as I had a fortnight ago,

you would wonder, as I do, how any one can be much worse than that, and yet alive."

Cyril shivered.

"We shall meet again," he said, with a tone of quiet conviction. "It may be we shall only have time to say 'good-bye.' But Heaven which is merciful, and which suffered us to love each other, will not take away my darling until I have told her my heart was true to her through all, and she has whispered back that she forgives me."

"And you will come with me?"

"Of course. Couldn't we start before to-night. Oh, Goldsmith, you can't understand the agony the delay will be to me, and these miserable crawling French trains. I feel in a fever at the thought of their slowness."

"Be thankful you came here to-day, and that I had not to seek you out; we can feel at least that there has been really no time lost; had you met me on my arrival we could not have left for England sooner."

"And when shall we be there. Lose not a moment, and, Goldsmith, can't money do something, surely it ought to effect a few hours difference in the time of our journey."

"I will telegraph to King's Cross for a special train to Whitby, to be in readiness whatever time we arrive on Thursday-morning," said the banker, thoughtfully; "but I see nothing more to do. We shall be there by Thursday night at latest, just a week after the date of May's letter."

"A week." Cyril's face turned pale at the thought of the delay, and all that might have happened in it, but Adam Goldsmith had a ray of comfort for him.

"No," said the banker, gently; "you need not fear that; she is still alive, or May would have telegraphed to me."

"Will you not send word we are coming?"

"I think not."

"Why not?"

"We cannot tell with any certainty the precise hour of our arrival. Think of May's own suspense. Besides, Westwood, depend upon it, sudden joy does not kill. If only you are with her Dorothy Courtenay, will never wonder how you came there."

They travelled with the utmost speed money could procure; but, alas, it seemed very tedious to poor Cyril's anxious mind.

If he could only have put the wings of his impatience to the flagging engine. Each delay was absolute torture to him, and, but for Goldsmith's entreaties, he would not have attempted to take food.

"You must eat and drink," said his mentor, firmly. "Remember, if you present yourself before Miss Courtenay haggard and exhausted, in her weak state you may give her a terrible shock."

Westwood groaned.

"I never saw anything like these foreign trains. They simply crawl along!"

It was a relief to his companion when they were on board the steamer, and Cyril could walk off some of his restlessness by pacing to and fro, instead of chafing in his seat like some wild beast in a cage all too small for it.

Many of the passengers wondered what trouble had befallen the handsome stranger, who seemed possessed with such a feverish anxiety for the vessel's reaching Dover, and who, whenever he was not gazing listlessly on the water, was engaged in abstruse calculations in Bradshaw.

"Courage," whispered Goldsmith as they took their places in the London train. "The worst part of the journey is over."

As they passed through Park-lane, driving from Victoria to King's Cross, Mr. Goldsmith insisted on stopping at Lord Vivian's house. In vain Cyril fumed, his friend declared he might go on without him if he pleased, but he himself would at least bear what bulletins had reached the Earl's London house.

He was barely two minutes away, and when he returned his face was so grave and troubled that poor Cyril jumped to the conclusion they were too late.

"It's no use going on," he said, gloomily. I could not face them now. We have killed her between us—my precious cousin and myself."

"She is not dead," said Goldsmith, gravely. "But Sir Bryan and Lady Constance have been sent for. They passed through London on their way to the Court yesterday. Basil Courtenay is already there, and, but for her husband's illness, which still detains them abroad, Lady Vivian would also be with her now."

"And she is alive?"

"Yesterday's message said, 'Sinking fast.' Macdonald went down last night. My poor fellow, take comfort; we may be too late to save her, but I think you will be in time to see her once again."

"Once again," retorted Cyril, bitterly, "when, but for that she-fend, we should have had our lives to spend together! Once again when I have loved her for fifteen years, and for nine of them have looked forward to the day when she should be my wife. Of course, you can talk calmly. You don't know what it is!"

It said much for Adam's forbearance that he never told his excited companion he owed even this "once again" to him.

It told of what he had suffered himself, that he was patient enough not to remind Cyril of how he had played into Maude Desmond's hands.

Maidenly modesty, the shrinking fear of seeming to woo instead of waiting to be wooed, had closed Dorothy's lips, and made it impossible for her to demand an explanation of her lover's strange, abrupt departure; but nothing in the world prevented Cyril, after her letter, either demanding of herself the name of his noble rival, or telling Sir Bryan he left the Court because Dorothy would not smile on him.

In his pride—his miserable, jealous pride—he had left silent, while a word from him would have smoothed away all difficulties, and broken down for ever the barrier which Maude had so craftily reared between him and Dorothy.

But Adam Goldsmith was too merciful to remind his friend of this. He seemed, indeed, to be only anxious to soothe and console the man who showed him such scant gratitude.

"I telegraphed for a carriage and pair," he observed as they neared Whitby station. "In another hour you will be there."

The arrival of the special train caused quite a little sensation. Goldsmith's valet lingered to see after the luggage, but the two friends drove off at once at a gallop.

"What am I to say to them?" demanded Cyril when they had dashed through the lodge gates, and the man had shaken his head and answered their questions about Miss Courtenay with the one word, "Dying."

"How am I to face them?" he repeated. "Her father and mother, who loved and trusted me as a son. How can I face them when I have killed their child?"

"They won't think of that now," said Goldsmith, gently. "Only, pray control yourself, or you will never be allowed to see her."

"I will see her! No one shall prevent me! Is she not my own, living or dead?"

"And, Westwood, remember, not a word about your cousin's share in this. Dorothy's parents know nothing; need never know anything of our suspicions. For their sake do not let them guess all the poor child has suffered."

Late as it was, Vivian Court was brilliantly illuminated. There were lights in many windows; and servants flitted to and fro through all with a strange, hushed footstep, as though the angel of death, whose grim presence hovered near, had already cast his awe upon them.

Basil Courtenay was in the hall. He wrung Goldsmith's hand, but turned away as though he did not see the one which Cyril extended.

"I knew you would come," he said to the

banker. "Only I feared it would be too late; but May's faith never failed. She has said all day you would be here to-night, and the moment we heard wheels she sent me to see if it was you."

"How is she?"

No need to ask whom. Basil gave an angry glance at Cyril Westwood, and took no pains to soften his answer.

"Dying fast. There is no one with her but May and the nurse. It is too painful; she goes in and out, and the others wait in the drawing-room for her reports. We need never boast of our courage again," he added, bitterly, "since we are all too cowardly to bear and see what she has to suffer!"

"Where is she?"

"In May's boudoir."

As one who knew the house well Goldsmith turned in its direction, up the broad, oaken staircase, past the room where a woman's sob told him the heartbroken parents waited; on to where heavy velvet curtains had been pushed back to disclose a door nearly shut. He pushed it open and went in, Cyril in his wake.

On a couch near the fire lay the girl her lover had last seen in the zenith of her beauty and her loveliness; not two months had passed since Lucy's wedding day, but what havoc they had made in her sister's face, pale as marble, the golden-brown hair looking unnaturally bright from its contrast; and the eyes, the soft, tender grey eyes, had a look of great unexpressed, of some yearning, unfulfilled desire.

As she raised them and looked eagerly round the room, not seeming to see either her weeping cousin, or the kind old nurse, too weak to move herself from the sofa, it was evident the old fear was on her, for with one convulsive effort she lifted herself to a sitting attitude, folded her thin hands together, and with her sweet, weak voice, prayed,—

"Give me back my letter! I did not know that it would vex him. . . Oh, give it me back and let me rest!"

May Delaval felt rather than saw her lover enter.

As he took her hand and held it fast in his, the strangest sense of confidence and protection soothed her troubled spirit. She could not speak; a lump rose in her throat and choked back her words. She could only kneel there by Dorothy's sofa and wail—she hardly understood for what.

She knew that the man who looked at her cousin with such an agonising, remorseful tenderness was Cyril Westwood. She understood, without being told, that he had been as cruelly dealt by as Dorothy herself, but his conduct puzzled her.

He never spoke a word of greeting or endearment; he never offered a caress; he only seemed searching in his pocket. And when the heartrending cry came for the second time, he took a folded paper and placed it silently in the lap of the dying girl.

She did not seem to see him do it.

May, who had been with her cousin throughout her illness, knew that when in this strange state of sleep-walking (or rather sleep-waking, since she was now too feeble to walk, poor child!), Dorothy never did seem to see anything around her; but the thin fingers presently took up the paper, opened it, and held it towards the lamp, evidently to satisfy herself of its contents. Then a strange look of rapturous happiness crossed the poor, wasted face. With fitful, feverish strength, she tossed the letter into the fire, and then, in her own natural voice murmured "I can sleep now," let her head fall back on the pillow, and seemed to pass at once into refreshing slumber.

"She is dead," said Westwood, bitterly, thinking only of the closed eyes; "I have come too late."

Dr. Macdonald, who had entered unperceived, shook his head.

"She is asleep," he declared, positively, "the first natural sleep she has had for weeks,



[CYRIL WESTWOOD'S RETURN—A RAY OF HOPE.]

sir; I dare not speak too positively, but I think now you may venture to hope."

"Is the spell broken?" asked May.

"I cannot tell that yet. Mr. Westwood must not leave the room, indeed, he should, if possible, stay here until she wakes. If she recognizes him—as I hope she will—he must at once assure her nothing has changed her in his opinion. I do not often advocate deceit, but in this case the patient's one chance is for her to believe all her fears and terrors utterly unfounded, and I confess I see now a slight hope."

"Thank Heaven!" cried Cyril, fervently.

"All will depend on her awakening," went on Dr. Macdonald; "and now, Lady May, let me beg of you to go and lie down, indeed you will break down entirely if you do not get some rest. Mrs. Parkins will watch by your cousin, and, indeed, she will need nothing I think for some hours."

Adam Goldsmith joined his entreaties and May reluctantly left the boudoir. She was going towards her own chamber, when in a little ante room she saw her cousin Basil standing with such a look of misery on his face that she forgot her own fatigue in her desire to comfort him.

"Dorothy is better, Basil; they think now she may live."

"I know; Goldsmith has just told me."

"And yet you look more miserable instead of being comforted."

"I am not thinking of Dorothy, but of myself. It is cruel of me to trouble you when you are nearly worn out; but, oh, May, I must speak to someone or I shall go mad."

May's answer was to sink into a chair—she felt that stand much longer she could not—and assure Basil she was ready to hear him.

"I did not mean to seem hard and cold to you," she said kindly; "it was an awful blow to me when I heard you were engaged to Laura Peyton, for I loved Eileen so dearly, and I thought I could have made papa get

your parents to agree to it; but we must not quarrel now when Dorothy is so ill, and I will listen to you as readily as though you had not forsaken Eileen. It can't hurt her now," went on May, with a kind of choked sob, "for they buried her to-day; all my Eileen's pain and suffering, all her troubles, are over now for ever."

"I know," said Basil, brokenly. "I met the funeral as I was coming here. It was the first idea I had of her being gone."

His voice had a kind of sob, and May said, gently,—

"Then you *did* care for her a little?"

"I cared for her as my life's best love. When her letter came asking for her freedom, I was nearly beside myself. I proposed to Laura Peyton two days later out of pique, but I never ceased from loving Eileen. I simply could not!"

"I don't understand," said May, bewildered.

"You say *Eileen* broke the engagement?"

"I thought so till to-night. Macdonald has just told me of the cruel influence that has nearly taken my sister's life. May, can't you guess what I am thinking?"

"They were only half-sisters," said May, mistaking his meaning, "and Maude's strange mesmeric gifts came from her mother. Little Eileen was incapable of using such spells."

"You mistake me. Maude hated her sister.

It seems, too, there was a man here who wanted to marry Eileen—a kind of gentleman money-lender, who had some secret of Tom Desmond's in his power. Oh, May, can't you see what I mean? Not content with persecuting the poor girl to give me up, Maude Desmond may have been the author of that letter to me; she may, indeed, have written it in her own character, since I never saw her writing or Eileen's, and so could have no suspicions. Or she may," his voice trembled, "have used the same cruel power that made Dorothy her victim."

May shivered.

"And the letter?"

"I never doubted it was from Eileen. She

asked me to send back the flowers she gave me as a love token. How did anyone but herself know of its existence?"

"And you sent it?"

"With one single line, 'Let all be forgotten.' I am not sure those were the exact words."

"And it is too late," said May, in a strange, dreamy sort of voice. "Dolly may be restored to us, but Eileen has died believing you false. Oh, Basil, when I think of all the evil Maude Desmond has wrought in two months, I am terrified. It seems to me dangerous for her fellow creatures that such a creature should live!"

"And Laura?" broke in Basil, impetuously.

"What is to be done about her?"

"You must marry her."

"I cannot," declared poor Basil. "I never cared about her. You will be ashamed of me I know, May, but I only proposed to her out of pique. I wanted to show Eileen someone else could appreciate me if she did not."

"But you can't punish Miss Peyton because you have made a mistake. You *must* marry her, Basil. Recollect your word is pledged to her!"

"It was pledged to Eileen first."

"But Eileen has been taken."

"You need not remind me of that! Oh, May, when I saw her funeral it nearly killed me!"

"How did you know it was hers?"

"That extraordinary old woman at Lord Desmond's lodge was following the procession. She came to a dead stop when she saw me, and made the most peculiar speech."

"I hear she nursed Eileen as though she had been her own child. What did she say?"

"Ah, young man, you may look. Looking won't undo the past. This is Eileen Desmond's funeral, and if you think you've had a hand in bringing her to her grave I quite agree with you. She was a sweet creature, and much too good for this world or the people in it!"

(To be continued.)



[AT THE BAZAAR—A TRYING MOMENT FOR ALVA.]

NOVELETTE.]

A QUEEN AMONG WOMEN.

—C—

CHAPTER I.

"WHAT a lovely picture. By Jove! she beats the English beauties into fits!" ejaculated an aristocratic young fellow, lithe of limb, and full of leonine grace—a fine type of the real English gentleman. Clear cut features, a Byronic brow, and sparkling blue eyes completed the description of Sir Clinton Carew.

His eyes danced with a merry light, as they used to do when he was a boy and came across an especially fine butterfly, as he glanced down upon a sleeping girl lying beneath the shade of a grove of olives. Her head was pillowed on a tangled mass of burning red blossoms, making a vivid contrast to her raven black hair that clustered in soft tendrils around her broad forehead.

One daintily curved tiny foot peeped from her blue skirt.

Some red lilies were gasped in her sun-kissed hands.

The longer he gazed, the more he became interested at the innocent abandon of the attitude and the bewitching beauty of the sleeper held him almost spell-bound.

Very stealthily he approached her, determined to stay and see this sleeping wood-nymph awake.

"I wonder what she will say when she sees a stranger by her side?" he thought, somewhat ashamed at his own impudent proceeding. "At all events, she is only a peasant, lovely as she is. I'll soon put matters straight. I'll buy her flowers. There's nothing like gold; it is a potent key, and unbars gates of iron, and must those coral gates for me."

Seconds merged into minutes, precious ones to the silent watcher, who forgot time, everything, except one delightful fact, that he had

found a fairer human picture than any he had ever seen in a frame.

A dreamy ecstasy stole over his frame as the leaves rustled musically in the soft southern breeze, and the swish, swish, of the sea beyond lapped the shore.

At last her eye-lashes quivered, and a pair of midnight eyes unclosed—eyes that resembled large black grapes framed in ebony fringe.

She gave a little yawn, stretched out her half bare arms, and was about to rise when she saw the intruder with amazement tinged with anger.

"I—I really beg your pardon," he remarked rather sheepishly, "but the fact is, I was very tired and hot, and rambled up here to rest in the shade when I saw you and your pretty flowers, so took the liberty of waiting a bit to buy some," fumbling in his pocket for a sovereign.

"You were mistaken, sir, I am no flower girl!" she said, a disdainful curl on her short upper lip which certainly did not assist him to be at his ease.

"Please do not be offended. I am sure I had no intention to annoy or wound you," he replied earnestly.

"Is it the custom of Englishmen to take for granted a person is a flower vendor because they possess a few?"

A hot flush leaped to his fair Saxon face at this home thrust.

"I see I have affronted you," he observed, in real distress for fear she would refuse to hold further parley with him. "Won't you pardon me, a stranger to your customs? Besides, I am perplexed—astonished to see a—lady in the garb of a peasant. Surely you will make a little allowance for a blundering son of John Bull!"

"John Bull, then, as you term the men of England, should not rush at conclusions, but remember that a lady's feelings may dwell beneath the simple gown. People whose opinions are worth recording say that Nature

creates the gentleman and woman, not the clothes; but there!"—this with a condescending nod of pardon which made her doubly bewitching, "I will say no more, since I see you are truly sorry."

"I am very grateful to you, and to convince me I am pardoned entirely, suppose you tell me how it is you speak my language so fluently and perfectly, and why those pretty feet are innocent of covering?" he asked, boldly.

"Your language was taught me by one of the Fathers at yonder monastery," pointing to an ancient pile which reared its hoary head towards the blue sky. "But I am only half Italian; my mother was English. As to my lack of shoes, when I go down to the sea I never wear them. I prefer to feel the sand and waves and flowers about them."

"Such lovely ones, I admit, require no covering," he said, ardently. "It was the novelty only that made me curious. I am so glad to hear you half belong to my country!"

"Without boots!" she laughed mischievously, looking bashfully down the next second as his eyes gazed into her liquid ones somewhat too ardently, and then strayed to those dainty feet and ankles.

"Just as you are you would surpass all the over-dressed beauties—put them in the shade. Now be kind to me—give me a flower!"

"You may have them all, but they will soon fade, I fear;" and she bent forward with infinite grace to offer them.

"They may lose their freshness and may wither, but the memory of the sweet giver will remain vivid and bright as their colour is now; won't you tell me the name of their owner, so that it may also be stored among my treasures?"

"Alva Marcella. And yours?"

"Clinton Carew" he answered frankly. "Have you ever been in England, Miss Marcella?"

"Never; but some day, perhaps, Fate may be kind and transport me there!"

"I wish I could be that thing styled Fate,"

he answered, all his soul in his eyes, making her blush a glowing carnation, as she thought how noble, how handsome he looked, so different to the tawny sons of the sunny land, in his pure Saxon type of manhood.

"Who knows but perhaps we may meet some day?" she interposed.

"Ah, that some day! We have a song called that, but it is full of sadness. It runs thus:

"I know not when the day shall be,
I know not when our eyes shall meet;
What welcome you may give to me;
Or will your words be sad or sweet.
It may not be till years have passed,
Till eyes are dim and tresses grey;
The world is wide, but love at last,
Our hands, our hearts, must meet someday."

"The words are very sweet, though sad," she said, her eyes swimming with sympathy. "I wish I knew them."

"Do you?" this eagerly, as he saw the golden opportunity of gaining her consent to meet him again. "I will bring the song to-morrow if you will be here."

"You are very kind," she replied, simply. "I am ardently fond of poetry and will be pleased to have them."

"I wish I was a poet, or better still, a painter," he said, almost tenderly.

"Why?"

"Because you should be my muse and inspiration. I am sure no painter ever had so fair a model."

"Are we not getting a little too free?" she protested, "considering we are strangers, Mr. Carew?"

"Everyone must be strangers before they become friends," he hastened to reply, fearful lest his fervid manner would offend, and she retract her promise of meeting him again.

"I know that," she said, softly, the magnetic power of his fascinations gradually breaking down her reserve while there fluttered into her heart a delicious sense of joy, a nameless something she had never felt before.

They chatted on, drinking sweet draughts of young love's elixir, subtly dangerous to both, and his voice became winningly low in its depths of tenderness while her lustrous eyes sought for flowers and impossible shaped stones to evade his impassioned ones.

Ever and anon, though like a true daughter of Mother Eve, she would take a shy peep into his handsome face and wonder at its fairness, its brightness, so different from the men she had ever seen in this out-of-the-way hamlet.

A silence more eloquent than words fell upon them; the cool breeze straight from the little bay fanned their cheeks, and sent the blood coursing through their veins wildly—madly—for Elysium was theirs.

Cupid, with his wicked little arrow, had pierced these young hearts, and then darted away to watch the mischief he had wrought, for ere they separated Alva Marcello, guileless and pure as the pearly heavens above her raven little head (she was like a newly-imprisoned bird), would never be free or the same merry frolicsome thing again.

"By Jove, I've gone and done it now," Sir Clinton told himself, as he wended his way back to the inn where he had put up, it being the only accommodation the village possessed, with the keen edge of his appetite blunted.

"What the deuce is to be done? It is very sure I couldn't make her my wife. My mother would go crazy with her old prejudices of caste; and, as for the dear old dad, it would be his death blow, and he is near enough to that arch enemy already, Heaven knows!"

This with a sigh.

"I—I must get her to—to—" but here he stopped lest the zephyrus should waft the black thought he had dared to conceive to the Italian maid he had left in the valley.

CHAPTER II.

THE moonlight shimmered upon the waters of the bay, a white sailed felucca appeared in the sheeny calm. "A painted ship on a painted ocean."

There was a soft stillness all around, which seemed more intensified by an occasional murmur from the village.

Alva glided like a houri to the trysting place among the tangled ferns, while the flowers entwined themselves amorously, like fervid young lovers around her feet, and the breeze toyed with her hair.

As she drank in the beauty of the balmy evening, she wondered if those spangled heavens above her could be more fair.

A week of unalloyed bliss had been hers, for every morn or eve she had met Sir Clinton Carew, and had learnt to love him with all the strength of her pure soul.

It was a blind, holy feeling, devoid of the slightest selfishness. He was, in her eyes, perfect—a man to be worshipped, adored as a kind of saint.

She, in her innocence, could not dream that a man with the head of a Greek god, possessed feet of the commonest clay, that he was then planning something so heinous, so dark, that she would have turned and fled from the spot before he could reach the trysting place.

"My love! my love! what is keeping you?" she murmured impatiently; then the welcome sound of a footstep made her bosom throb with delight. "It is he, my king, my king," she added.

She sprang into Sir Clinton's arms, and lay on his breast, her starry eyes sparkling with the joy she felt in his embrace, in his beloved presence.

She gazed up at him with tender rapture. Every line of her exquisite face glorified with the stainless purity of a Diana in its own strength.

"Why, my Alva, you shiver!" he said, tenderly threading his fingers through her hair caressingly.

"Do I! then it is excess of happiness; do you know I had begun to get anxious, to fear you would not come perhaps; when I heard your step."

"What if I had been forced to stay away from you to-night, darling?" he asked with a sigh, which did not escape her.

"I should have cried all night in despair," she answered, shading her eyes as if to shut out the terrible thought.

"You distress me, Alva, for I dare not contemplate what must be—what, in fact, I am here to tell you."

"You mean you are going away?" she said brokenly, a little sob catching her throat, a giddiness seizing her brain, a horrible numbness creeping to her heart.

"Would I could say no," he answered, sadly. "Heaven knows my heart is sore, darling, to sickness!"

"But you will return?" she urged, brokenly. "I wish I could say yes. The fact is I am summoned to England to attend my father's death bed."

"Oh, Clinton! say you will not stay away—that you will return?" she wailed, all maidenly barriers crushed down in this supreme moment of pain. "I should die if I thought you were lost to me for ever!"

"Alva, do not tempt me. Satan has already been at his fell work," he said, huskily; "and I feel less a man and more a demon with your arms about my neck!"

"What do you mean?" she faltered, half shrinking from his wild embrace.

"That you must be mine, come what may," he returned, his brain dizzy, his breath issuing from his fevered lips in short, broken gasps.

"That is all I crave, all I ask, to follow you through weal, through woe, till death; to be your companion, your dear solace, in sickness, in health. I am sure I could get my father's consent."

"Your father!" he repeated, mechanically. "Consent to what?"

"To our marriage, Clinton," clinging to him in a wild paroxysm of fervour that only a Southern nature could feel. "The good father over at the monastery would marry us to-morrow morning, and then we should be one in soul, in very truth. Your people would be my people, your God my God."

A flush of deep mortification stole into his face at these innocent words—words that fell on his feverish frame like molten lead as he thought over the black answer he was about to give to this lovely girl of the South—an answer which he, a proud aristocrat, felt it imperative to give, though it might blight her hope and confidence in man—ay, in Heaven itself.

"My darling! my adored one! why talk of the cold, conventional interference of an old priest? It is treason to mingle our precious love with such jargon! We belong to each other by the rights of nature, which tramples down all laws, human and divine, laughs at them as silly nonsense, only required by those whose hearts are not mated. Let us cast off the shackles and trammels of so-called Society—a sham creed created by man—and live in the delights of our dear love. Our lives will be one entrancing dream of bliss, never ending, but increasing in its strength with years for its sweet freedom."

A shudder ran through her lithe frame, leaving it frozen as if death had set its icy hand upon her.

She broke from his arms, a lurid glare of scorn shone in those dusky orbs terrible to witness. Then her pent up anger burst forth in a torrent, causing him to quail and shrink in abject fear and remorse.

"Have you finished, Sir Clinton Carew?" she cried.

"Yes," he faltered, blankly. "Alva, my love! my love! strike me dead at your feet, but do not freeze me with that look of hate! a flush of deep shame crimsoning his face at the enormity of his vile proposal.

"Hate!" she retorted, in a hard, metallic voice so unlike her soft, liquid tones. "I despise you too much for such a feeling! To hate any one they must have been worthy once of affection! It is abhorrence, contempt! Go! and never dare to darken my life again on earth!"

"Alva, in Heaven's name listen!—have mercy on me!—let me explain!"

"Go! I repeat; and plead for pardon to an offended Father, whose image you have so vilely effaced!"

"Won't you forgive me?" he asked, gloomily.

"Never! From this hour I am your enemy! I swear to avenge this insult to a Marcello! You thought me too mean, too pitiful a creature to raise to the dizzy heights of a baronet's wife; while I held a secret which would have been revealed only after marriage that your boasted pride of birth and rank would have paled and shrunk into insignificance beside. You traitor to love, to honour, to all man or woman revere! You are my inferior in everything!"

"Spare me!" he implored, humbled to the very dust at last by her scathing scorn, "and permit me to speak a few words. Do not drive me away, perhaps to destruction, in your just anger!"

"Go! I refuse to listen to you, and pray I may never cross your path! The Italian blood that flows in my veins forbids me to hold further speech with a would-be betrayer!"

Seeing that his prayers were powerless to soften her indignation, he retreated from her, his sunny head bowed in very shame, his senses half-dazed, numbed, as it were, murmuring—

"What a foul wretch she thinks me. By heavens! I feel I could kill myself as a worthless reptile for polluting the innocent mind of one so pure, so sweet, in her young innocence."

While he loaded himself with bitter reproaches for his perfidy, Alva, when alone, cast herself down in a frenzy of misery among

the flowers and soft dewy grass to water them with a torrent of tears wrung from her over-charged brain.

"Judas!" she hissed. "Traitor to love, to honour, to all that is human and divine, I could have stabbed him as he stood, and yet how I loved him. It is bitter! it is bitter!"

In her agony her little hands tore up clumps of turf and flowers and scattered them in shapeless fragments to the winds. Her proud spirit had received a shock which overwhelmed her in its intensity, and nearly shattered her reason for a short while.

Hours came and went, yet she lay battling with her crowning sorrow, every nerve and fibre in sympathy with her cruel conflict.

Could Sir Clinton Carew have seen her in her abject despair, it would have wrung his heart and urged him on to do some rash deed, to, perhaps, hurl himself into the dancing, mocking surf from the steepest rock he could find.

CHAPTER III.

"PATTISON, do you think it possible to keep me alive till my granddaughter could come from Italy?"

"You ask me for the truth, my lord, and I will not deceive you with false hopes. Your hours are numbered."

The poor emaciated face became rigid with some inward agony of remorse at these ominous words as they fell from the doctor's lips.

"I would give five thousand pounds, Pattison, to hold out. Do something to keep the spark of life in me till I can ask my deeply wronged daughter's child's forgiveness. It is hard to die like this."

"You know, my lord, that I would move Heaven and earth to accomplish your will, but I am powerless now. Not all the science in the kingdom could stay the hand of our Master."

"It is hard!" Lord Rintoul moaned, twining his slender fingers together in mute distress. "I am rightly punished. I showed no mercy to my poor injured child, and now I am cut off without one word of pardon from the girl she prayed me to succour and restore to her rights on her dying bed."

"I understood you had done all that lay in your power to repair any harshness, my lord," interposed Dr. Pattison, soothingly. "I refer to the alteration in your will."

"Oh, yes, of course I did. All is now reversed. Mrs. George will get three hundred a year, her daughter five thousand for a dot; the rest I leave to my granddaughter, with the Hall and estates—in fact, everything, so my poor Alva will now rest in peace in her grave."

"Having settled everything to your own satisfaction, take my advice, rest content. Let not the few precious hours left you be disturbed. Leave a message for the young lady with me; or, better still, let me write a few words saying what you would say if she were here by your side at this moment—you can sign it."

"Heaven bless you, old friend, for the happy thought!" he returned, eagerly, trying to rise in his bed, in the momentary excitement forgetting his weakness.

A sheet of paper was instantly procured, and Doctor Pattison wrote at the dying man's dictation.

Then he guided the trembling fingers to write his signature, which brought a sigh of relief and a smile of gratitude to his faithful old friend.

That completed, he sat beside the bed administering wine or stimulant of some kind, holding the old lord's hand, till it grew colder and colder, and at last relaxed from the firm affectionate clasp.

The once stern, proud spirit softened and humbled, passed into a slumber which knows no waking, and burst its mortal bonds to join the bright choir of celestial spirits above,

whose rejoicing must have been great over the penitence of a soul they had plucked from perdition, and which had been nearly lost.

"Alva, Alva, where are you?"

"Here I am, papa," said a clear rich voice.

"What do you want?"

"Your grandfather is dead, see here is the letter from the solicitors."

The girl took the black edged letter in her hands, which shook with intense agitation, and read the contents, then tears, great pearly drops, welled in her dark eyes, and she said sorrowfully—

"Poor dear grandpa, he relented at last. May Heaven be merciful to him, and forgive him as freely as I do now."

"His repentance came rather late, my child; when death had clutched him, at all events," Mr. Marcello replied bitterly; "his cruel conduct hurried your poor, unhappy mother into a premature grave, and ruined me; all my estates are confiscated through vile slander, for no man was more loyal to his king than I; his power and influence dogged me, till I feel now I could curse him as he lies dead."

"He has made reparation, papa, he could do no more. We are all sinful, if not in one way in another, his was revenge at my dear mother marrying you. We know not what pain her disobedience caused him, or how it hardened him against us all."

"He is dead, so we will not discuss him further child. I only know what terrible privations we have endured, how you have had to live in this little hamlet, you, the daughter of one of the oldest and noblest families in Italy, on one side, and an earl's grandchild on the other."

"Let us try and forget his cruelty," she pleaded softly; "it only harrows up one's feelings, and hardens our hearts to remember the past, papa."

"I place no restriction upon your actions or feelings, Alva, but my hatred to him in life will remain as long as I breathe; it is the creed of a Marcello to hate once hate always. I would spurn, even curse him, if he lay here dead at my feet!"

Alva looked at the stern, dark face, almost demoniac in its grand fury, and her own eyes kindled with a remote sympathy, for she knew her own nature was as fierce and hard, when it was roused, as his, notwithstanding her mother's gentle English blood which flowed through her veins.

"You must go to England at once," he said, abruptly breaking the silence.

"Not alone, papa," she answered in affright, her eyes dilating at the thought of being, perhaps, sent to that land of cold, proud English men and women, whom she had learnt by bitter experience, to dread and suspect.

"Of course I shall accompany you, and stay to see you comfortably settled at the Hall; then I shall return, the leaden skies of England would stifle me; besides, I have business here that must be attended to."

"But I shall be so lonely, papa," she said diamally.

"I must provide against that. Mrs. George Rintoul, the widow of a nephew of the late Earl's, and her daughter have resided at the Hall; perhaps I may prevail upon her to remain for awhile."

"She is English, and I somehow dislike them all," she protested warmly.

"So was your dear mother, remember that," he observed gravely; "for her sake we must not be prejudiced against people who have done us no wrong. Unjustness is not an attribute I wish to see in her child. Heaven knows we have both suffered from its wrong at the hand of one man."

Alva, though two years had passed over her bonny head, never erased from her memory the one Englishman who had proved so basely false.

"They will be here in a few minutes," said Mrs. George Rintoul viciously.

Thus spoke a well preserved woman of

about forty, arrayed in a handsome dress glistening with jet.

The braids of her hair, which had a suspicious tinge of gold, as if it were not quite innocent of dye, were adorned with jet butterflies.

Anyone at the first glance would have taken her daughter to be her younger sister.

"I know I shall scarcely be able to suppress my dislike," said Alice, a pretty blonde with a pink and white complexion and sleepy blue eyes, as she lolled on a couch in a rather sulky temper at being forced to welcome her young relative to her home.

"It is no use showing these people your hand, Alice. Goodness knows I would as soon welcome a serpent as these Italians to lord it here where I have lived undisputed mistress. We must be wary, and receive them with a show of cordiality. Consider the contrast of living on a few paltry hundreds a year, which we shall be compelled to do in some horrid stuccoed villa, as they style those atrocities, and residing in a grand old place like this with servants and every luxury, just because we are rash enough to expose our true feelings to this interloper."

"You are right, mamma, I know, but think of the mortification of having her take precedence of me, which she, as an heiress and mistress here, is bound to do, when we had every reason to believe all would be different."

"Cease child, you drive me mad," her blue eyes becoming steely, her mouth set with fury. "If I only had the slightest suspicion a new will lay concealed in the old cabinet by the side of that death-bed, I would have torn it to shreds, and then stirred it down in the fire. Deluded fools we were."

"Hark! here they are; I can hear the carriage; it has entered the lodge gates!" Alice exclaimed, starting up with a pink flush on her face, but not of pleasure, and catching her mother's bejewelled hand in hers to receive the travellers at the portal of the grand entrance.

Alva and her father were welcomed with effusion which went far to win over the lovely young heiress, for she had not expected such a greeting, knowing she had usurped the position they had every reason to believe would have fallen to their lot.

After dinner Mr. Marcello ventured to observe, in a pleasant tone,—

"I have to thank you, Mrs. Rintoul, for the kind reception you and Miss Rintoul accorded my daughter and myself. I had feared that natural disappointment at the provisions of the late earl's will would have caused a feeling of coldness, I might say aversion."

"I trust misfortune may never make me unjust. I do not grudge Miss Marcello her good fortune, though I had, I confess, every reason to believe it was ours. I have a little competency for our simple requirements," this as she raised a deep black bordered handkerchief to her eyes, which were full of angry fire instead of tears, "and—and, I suppose it will have to suffice when we leave the Hall, which the earl always led us to believe would be ours. Of course I shall feel the leaving keenly after five years. I know my poor darling child will fret when the bitter parting takes place."

"Why need you leave it?" he asked, kindly; "my daughter will be friendless, alone in the world when I return to the south."

"Are you going to desert her?" she exclaimed in amazement.

"I am compelled to go. I have a mission to perform; one that I have sworn to carry out, to remove the accursed ban of treason that hangs over my head, and recover my property. You would be invaluable to Alva, who, though well educated, is as yet ignorant of the usages and customs of English life. Your daughter, too, would be a charming companion. In offering you a permanent home at the Hall I am studying my

interests even more than yours, I frankly admit."

The lady pressed his hand in a theatrical fashion, sighed complacently, then wiped from her eyes some imaginary tears, and answered in silky tones,—

"Do as you will with Alice and myself, we are wholly at yours and your sweet daughter's service."

In a week's time Mr. Marcello took his departure perfectly easy in his mind that Alva was in excellent hands with Mrs. George Rintoul, and eager to carry out the purpose of his life—regain his honour and fortune.

Alva felt keenly the separation from her father, whose love and affection had been so lavishly, so unstintingly, bestowed.

"I almost wish this property had never come to me," she sobbed, "since it parts us, papa," as she clung to him, loth to say the cruel word "Good-bye."

"We may meet sooner than I expect, dear child," he said, stroking her head fondly. "Depend upon it you will always be in my thoughts."

Her dusky eyes, unfathomable in their mysterious depths, followed the carriage till it was hidden from view. Then with a weary cry of pain she turned away and sought her room to weep out the sorrow which was almost more than she could bear.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a delicious July morning, about six weeks after Mr. Marcello bade good-bye to his daughter, and had literally shook the dust off his feet from off-changeable old England, that Alva took it into her pretty head to have a stroll all by herself, by the murmuring, babbling trout stream skirting the park. There to dream beside its shallow reaches and shady pools, of a handsome fair face, with intense fascinating eyes and a tawny moustache. The trout and grayling popped up and dived about their weedy beds, as if the merry, laughing sunshine infected them with joyous mirth.

"They say in Italy that the English do not know what a blue sky is," thought Alva, as she sauntered on, lost in a sweet, dreamy reverie.

A pure white gown of some delightful, foamy muslin floated around her supple figure, only confined by a pearl waistband of great value.

A tiny pearl brooch fastened the lace frill at her throat; tucked in the belt was a spray of deep crimson rosebuds.

Pearls were her favourite jewel; they suited the rich, dark, olive face to perfection, and she, being the essence of good taste, always robed herself like some exquisite picture of Rubens.

A party of village youngsters ran along the narrow path, gathering rushes and wild flowers; their faces and bare arms as brown as berries, where the glorious sun had kissed them, and sent forth wild shouts of delight when they espied a ladybird or a delicate white butterfly.

Their boisterous glee was instantly checked when they neared the gracious young mistress of the Hall, abashed at their audacity, knowing they had trespassed, it being a private right of way.

A sweet, sunny smile, as she bent down and kissed the smallest child, a tiny toddler of two years, whose fat brown hands were full of the spoil, acted like magic.

One and all gathered around her dainty feet and kissed her white robe, and cast their flowers on the emerald turf for her to walk upon. She seemed to their simple natures a being too beautiful for earth, a creature to be worshipped.

"Come! come! little ones," she said, affectionately, "I am not a saint, you know; shall I find you some better flowers?"

They all hung back shyly, for fear they had done wrong in evincing their love for this

beautiful being who towered like a sweet spirit from the pearly skies above their young heads.

"Come along! don't be timid!" she added coaxingly, catching hold of the two-year-old child and leading them to a green gate, a near out into the rosery, where they all looked open-mouthed at the magnificent show of roses.

Each one she loaded with the fragrant queen of flowers, and they ran home to their mothers, brimming over with ecstasy, their hearts positively beating to reveal the honour that had been conferred upon them by the beautiful lady at the Hall.

"I am wealthy, and they do say beautiful," she murmured, as she heard the children's subdued whispers of delight as they trooped away; "and yet all these possessions have not the power to make me as happy as a few roses did those little ones. Is it that I am hard to please, or ungrateful, or what?"

Here her reverie stopped, for she felt unable to argue even with her own thoughts. They would stray unbidden to the shifting waters of a bay, and to a pair of brown eyes, intensely earnest in their passion, or softly persuasive when they tried to eat into her guileless soul, and force her to forget all in the insidious coils of a mad love.

"It is madness to—to remember that time of humiliation," she mused as she strolled beneath the shelter of the trees. "Why cannot I bury the wretched past in oblivion instead of harping for ever upon it?"

"Here, boy, take my rod to the 'Rintoul Arms,' and carry my basket with it," said a voice in commanding tones, yet with that unmistakable ring which only a gentleman of refinement and high culture can use.

Alva stood transfixed—petrified for one brief moment, then, with an immense effort, she recovered her outward calm, although her large eyes flashed, and her nostrils quivered in the intensity of her excitement, for well she knew the owner of that voice.

Face to face they were nearing each other. It was impossible to escape, for the stream ran to her right, the park-wall to her left.

It was fate, something more mysterious than she could divine.

How she panted till she felt suffocated, while her heart beat fiercely as she stood at bay waiting to allow him to pass.

On, on he came, his brown velvet shooting coat making him look handsomer than ever. A little thrill of pain, mixed with triumph leaped into her eyes, and her sensitive little mouth quivered as he neared her.

"I fear I have taken an unwarrantable liberty in coming this way," he remarked, bowing, and raising his straw cap, when, with a start of bewilderment, he fell back as if he were shot, scarcely believing the evidence of his own eyes or senses.

"It is Alva!" he said, a flush, of shame rushing to his white brow.

"Miss Alva Rintoul," she answered, frigidly. Every word that fell from those rich, red lips seemed to freeze, to torture, him by the marble coldness she assumed.

"Miss Alva Rintoul!" he repeated, incoherently.

"Is it so very marvellous, Sir Clinton Carew then to see me in England?" she rejoined, mockingly. "I think I alluded to our meeting in England, perhaps?"

"Yes, oh yes!" he stammered, overwhelmed with confusion. "I think you did; but I am so surprised, you see, and am trespassing, too, on your land; for you must be the new owner of this property, and we are neighbours."

"Indeed!" she said, coldly. "The world is not so large after all as people would imagine."

"No, it isn't; is it?" he replied, positively at a loss what sane answer to give this vision of beauty, clad in virgin white, with costly pearls a princess would envy clasping her waist. "The fact is, I was contemplating calling upon the new mistress of the Hall. Mrs. George Rintoul and I are old friends,

though I little dreamt I should find you there."

"Mistress? No, truth is stranger than fiction, frequently, Sir Clinton!"

This meaningly, as she cast for a second a hungering glance of pity and remorse from her eyes at the evident pain she was inflicting, and had sworn to carry out to the bitter end, even though it cost her very heart in twain.

"Yes, it undoubtedly is. May I have the pleasure of paying the call, Miss Rintoul, according to my intention?"

"Yes, I have no objection to make, especially as Mrs. George Rintoul is already a friend of yours, and, therefore, I conclude also of the Earl, my late grandfather. We shall be at home to-morrow after one, till then permit me to say adieu."

With an imperious inclination of her proud little head she swept past him towards the Hall, the perfume from the roses she wore leaving their sweetness to madden him for the egregious blunder he had made in that long ago, when Alva, the simple Italian maiden, spurned him and swore to be revenged.

"I felt like a whipped cur in her presence. By Heavens! she looked superb—a Juno! Confounded am I that I was! I wish I could blot out that wretched hour from my life; no peace or real happiness have I known since. Women are insipid dolls, whose smiles and blandishments pall upon me—fill me with disgust."

"At last! at last!" Alva said to herself as she rambled on. "Oh! it will be hard to carry out my vow, but I'll do it if it kills me. He must suffer for the base insult he offered to a Marcello, one so black in its enormity that I feel its sting now. Yes, Clinton, my lost love, you must suffer, so must I, for revenge is sweet."

True to the formal invitation of Alva, Sir Clinton presented himself, and was received by both Mrs. George and her daughter with friendly courtesy; yet he found it very difficult to appear at his usual ease, try as he did to conceal it.

"You have been away a long time, Sir Clinton. We shall expect to hear no end of adventures among the brigands and dark-eyed beauties of sunny Italy," laughed Mrs. George. "By-the-by, Miss Rintoul is a native of Italy."

"Indeed!" put in the Baronet, nervously, not daring to look in the direction of Alva, "I was there two years ago, you know."

Alva sat fanning herself with a big, scarlet feather fan in the shadow of a Liberty silk curtain, appearing perfectly cool and indifferent.

"What would I give to be as cool as she is," he thought ruefully, almost envying her that tranquil grace. "It is evident she never really cared for me."

"Well, but where have you been since? Come, gratify us with a little gossip, Sir Clinton," urged the elder lady.

"Oh, do!" chimed in the fair Alva sweetly, and looking at him out of her blue eyes with languishing entreaty.

"I am afraid my adventures are very few and uninteresting, and would only bore you, Miss Alice. Besides, I am not good at description, you know."

"You are too provoking," she laughed, showing her teeth, which she knew were very pretty ones. "Isn't he, Alva, dear?"

"Perhaps Sir Clinton's adventures are too precious to reveal," was the sarcastic reply from the quiet form in the recess.

Happily, at this juncture, to the relief of the uncomfortable Baronet, the vicar was announced, and he looked upon the break as a happy deliverance from a miserable dilemma.

The Reverend Daniel Rogers was a firm ally and friend of the young heiress. She was, in his estimation, almost perfect, and had inspired him with sincere affection, which was fully reciprocated by Alva.

"How is the school roof getting on?" she

asked animatedly, rising and taking his hand to lead him to a chair near to her.

"Capitally; and I flatter myself we shall have all completed by October, thanks to you, my dear Miss Rintoul."

"And to you," she put in, "who have worked so hard—so unstintingly."

"Permit me to take some little part in your new work, Mr. Rogers. Put me down for a couple of hundred towards the completion," suggested the Baronet.

"With much pleasure, Sir Clinton," returned the Vicar. "I am truly glad to see you once more amongst us. We have sadly missed your lamented father, I can assure you, in more ways than one."

"We have been thinking, Alice and I, that a bazaar would, perhaps, help us to rebuild the east wing of the church," Mrs. George observed. "What do you think of the project, Sir Clinton?"

"Splendid! I could stock a stall with trifles I have picked up in my wanderings," he replied, eagerly. "If you will allow me to have a finger in the pie."

His proposal was cordially accepted by all except Alva, who never deigned even to make a remark.

"Your offer is most generous, Sir Clinton. What says my ally here?" Mr. Rogers said, motioning to Alva good-humouredly.

"I—well—er—I suppose in so good a cause it matters little who aids it so that we succeed," she stammered, embarrassed for the moment out of her assumed calmness, much to the satisfaction of the young Baronet, who writhed under the icy barrier she had erected.

"One to me, my beautiful icicle," he mentally said; "you are at least forced to bring me into your plans and notice, in spite of your indifference."

"Do let me have some of your treasures to sell," Alice chirped, clapping her delicate little hands together with a playful abandon, which she thought killing.

"I will send them all here for Miss Rintoul and you to do with them exactly what you think best," Sir Clinton observed, not heeding her little arts to fascinate him one bit, for he found it impossible to keep his eyes away from the dainty, white-robed girl with the huge red fan.

"Has that dark-eyed, black-haired, half-Indian-looking creature bewitched him?" Alice thought, spitefully, enraged at his heedlessness. "I positively detest her; he was most attentive, even tender, to me once!"

Her astute mother saw the frown of jealous anger on her daughter's face and arrived at the reason instantly.

An evil, steely glitter shone in her eyes as they fell on the innocent culprit, whom she could see had bewitched the man they both had made up their minds to appropriate—one as a rich, influential son-in-law, the other as a husband to wheedle or scold as the fit took her little ladyship, out of no end of luxuries and extravagancies.

When the Vicar and Sir Clinton had taken their departure, Alva left the two ladies to themselves.

She longed to be alone—alone with no one to watch those dusky eyes melt in tears, to open the window of her soul, as it were, secretly, to wrestle with love and hate, and crush out of her woman's heart all softness, all the yearning passion which would persist in forcing its way unbidden, unwelcomed, by its relentless owner.

"He may love me, ah! even break his heart, while I will mock—laugh him to scorn!" she told herself, her lovely eyes sparkling tearfully at the sweet thought of her revenge. "Oh! the triumph of seeing him at my feet, pleading for a smile from the poor Italian girl, whom he then felt was too mean, too pitiful, a wail to make his wife. How my very pulses beat and throb at even the thought of it."

While Alva was calculating upon her revenge, dilating upon the torture she would

inflict, Mrs. George Rintoul and Alice were both in deadly convulse concerning herself.

Their masks were cast aside, and they spoke their minds freely. It was well for them, too, that the young mistress of the domain did not possess the gift of hearing as well as seeing through the so-called nine inch wall.

"It is positively exasperating to see his infatuation for a mere stranger!" snapped Alice, viciously, tilting her chair to and fro wrathfully. "She looks, too, more like some half-caste!"

"He will certainly slip through your fingers unless you are cautious, Alice. I had no idea he was a flirt."

"I wouldn't care if it had been anyone else; but it is galling to see this interloper come and wrest everything away from us, even to Sir Clinton now!"

"It will be your fault if you do not wrest him from her wiles," urged her mother.

"What am I to do? How do you propose in the name of wonder to stop it?"

"Sir Clinton is as proud as a Lucifer; you must throw out little hints of the terrible way she has been dragged up by that Italian adventurer of a father of hers; why I was really shocked last night at dinner to hear her boast of tramping about with bare feet! Fancy the indecency of it!"

"I wish he could have heard her with his strict ideas of refinement," put in Alice, her tongue barbed with venom. "When I mildly protested at the disgusting confession, she gave one of those derisive laughs and said, as bold as brass: 'What is there to be ashamed of? It was the custom of the humble folk, and I was humbled enough through cruel oppression and persecution.'"

"We will get her to relate some of her past experiences before Sir Clinton. She is so thick skinned that she will be sure to fall into the trap and let out her vulgar tricks."

"A splendid thought, mamma. We will both bring her out. If that doesn't sicken him, then I am mistaken in his character."

When the much talked-of bazaar took place Alva stood behind her prettily decked stall, looking more captivating than ever, much to the chagrin of Alice, who certainly had tried her utmost skill to array herself becomingly for the occasion.

"I might as well knock my head against a brick wall as try to cope with her," she muttered, beside herself with jealous rage, as she saw, with dismay, the crowd of men surrounding her stall.

A lemon-coloured craps gown, caught here and there by clusters of tiger lilies of vivid crimson, heightened Alva's glorious beauty. She appeared a kind of siren to witch away the senses of men, to lure them from peace to a fierce torment which they could not quell or resist, struggle as they might with their bonds.

Gracious, stately, smiling, she sold her knickknacks at fabulous prices, and with an imperious wave of her hand dismissed when she had fleeced them, saying, archly—"Please make way for the waiting victims, gentlemen."

Yet all the time her eyes scanned the large room for a head crowned with sunny curls.

All at once her face lit up and flushed as Sir Clinton became visible, edging his way with great difficulty through the crowd, fuming inwardly at the constant stoppages from many who persisted in shaking him by the hand, and welcoming him back to his native place.

Mamma with troops of marriageable daughters waylaid him, while the maidens giggled and simpered their delight at having him once more amongst them.

"Confound them all!" he muttered, ungallantly; "what with their insane chatter and sickly scent they disgust me!"

The nearer he approached his divinity, the more Alva's face changed and hardened, the little mouth, too, lost its smiles, yet her hands trembled so violently that a vase fell crash as he stood before her.

"How vexing," she exclaimed; "and I had sold it too."

"Give me the pieces," said the gentleman who had purchased it, "they will do as a memento of a delightful day, Miss Rintoul."

"Curse the fellow's impudence," murmured the Baronet, glaring at the offender fiercely, as Alva dexterously packed the fragments without comment in a box and handed it to him.

"What can I sell you, Sir Clinton?" she asked, in a matter-of-fact business air.

"One of those button-holes, if you will favour me by pinning it in my coat, Miss Rintoul," laying down a five pound note.

She complied without a word, while he felt his pulses leap and vibrate madly as her fragrant breath fanned his cheek, while the subtle scent from her hair positively intoxicated him with a ravishing ecstasy which he could scarcely conceal.

Her fingers, somehow, refused to remain steady with all the curb she tried so hard to put upon her feelings, and the pin fell down.

How he blessed that pin! It was to him a few precious moments of respite to sun himself and bask near her, and revel in the sweetness she shed about her.

"How careless I am!" she ejaculated, with an assumption of vexation, as she searched for her pin-cushion, which she had mislaid in her confusion.

At last the dainty posy was adjusted to his satisfaction; but how devoutly he had hoped some mishap would again occur to keep those little hands near him a few moments longer.

How he abstained from snatching them to his lips he never rightly knew.

"I have to give you four pounds change, Sir Clinton," she observed, taking up the note.

"Are they a guinea only?" he rejoined, eagerly. "Give me four more, please. I fancy I prefer that white rose-bud better than this gardenia."

She saw the drift of his meaning, and determined not to gratify his assumed fickleness.

"Then I must request you to kindly change it yourself, Sir Clinton," she replied, firmly.

"Won't you grant me so slight a favour?" he whispered in a pained voice.

"My time is too valuable to be wasted on fancies; other customers are waiting, Sir Clinton."

"Confound the apes!" he said under his breath. "It tortures me to see other men smiling and ogling her like a pack of idiots. If I could only win one of those smiles she used to lavish upon me in the sweet long ago I shouldn't care so much. It is galling, even maddening, to watch her with other fellows! I firmly believe I shall do something desperate one of these days if it continues!"

He loitered about from stall to stall, a willing though indifferent victim to the arts and snares so skillfully set for him by the fair saleswomen.

Alice swooped down upon him like a young vulture, refusing to take nay for yea as she coquettishly forced her wares upon him.

"I shall be quite too jealous if you don't give me a turn, too, for I know you have Alva—I mean Miss Rintoul. I saw the little interesting ceremony of pinning your flower, sir. Come, it is already very faded. It could not have been very fresh. Let me replace it with another," going up to him sportively to remove his treasure.

He shrank back from the sacrilege, as he deemed it, an angry light in his eyes, which said as plainly as if he had spoken the words, "Not to meddle with it if she did not wish to offend him mortally."

"I did not dream you set any store on such a frivolous thing as a flower!"

"When a lady honours me by placing it on my breast, Miss Alice, I look upon it, even if it were only a humble dandelion, as sacred!"

"I was only jesting, though it must, indeed, be a contrast for Alva to have a man of your position raving over a flower she had touched,

when a few short months back she scampered about shoeless, like some wild gipsy creature!"

"It matters not what she wore or omitted to wear. She could only be what she is—perfect; perfect in nature as she is in form and feature!" he said, warmly.

"Oh! if you are so far gone as that, there is no more to be said!" she retorted, thoroughly mortified at his eloquent praise, and feeling she would give the world to have a good cry to cool her inward wrath, which was at boiling point.

"Besotted fool! to waste his time and thought upon her! She is only leading him on. Anyone with a grain of sense can see she doesn't care a straw for him!" she told herself as she caught sight of Alva chatting with him a little later on. "Why, her face is as hard and cold as steel! Fool that he is, to make an idol of a stone! He'll rue it when it's too late!"

"How sour you look, child," her mother remarked, as they sipped their tea together. "Who's offended you, pray?"

"Everybody—everything! I wish I had never come to this horrid show!" she snapped, stirring her tea violently enough to smash the fragile china cup.

"What in the name of wonder is the matter?" asked the astonished lady.

"Is it not matter enough to hear a man compare that Alva creature to almost an angel when I exposed her low-bred ways in Italy?"

"I am afraid you have not used sufficient tact; these little affairs want delicacy. He is a queer nature, and would be sure to champion a girl if he thought it was said out of maliciousness."

"I spoke the truth, and she can't deny it. I was not going to butter my words."

"Do not look so fierce, child," chided her mother. "Leave Alva to me. I will try and break this growing intimacy. Why, two years back, when his poor father was alive, he was constantly here dancing attendance upon you, like some little Spaniel dog. He is only temporarily smitten, depend upon it."

"That remains to be seen," giving a shrug of incredulity as she hastened to serve somebody.

"Are you going to stay for the concert, Sir Clinton?" asked Mr. Rogers, going up to him as he was making his way mechanically towards Alva. "Miss Rintoul sings, you know."

"Miss Alva Rintoul?" asked the Baronet. "Yes, and I promise you will have a great musical treat. She has a magnificent voice."

"I shall, of course, stay," was his rejoinder.

When Alva appeared on the platform amid the exotics, she swept her eyes around for a glimpse of Sir Clinton among the sea of anxious, waiting faces, one and all bent towards her.

She had changed her dress for a priceless lace robe, panelled with exquisite tea roses, a bouquet of the fragrant blossoms she held in her hand, and roses were entwined among her massive braids.

When her glance fell on the Baronet all thought of her audience vanished, she was in a dream, lost to all sense of those spell-bound people who were waiting to hear the burst of melody from this gifted and beautiful enchantress.

Clear and sweet her grand voice rang out one of her favourite songs of the sunny south. It was an impassioned love-ditty, all the fervid passion she possessed she threw into it for the ear of "one," and one alone, to enthral, entrance, him beyond his control. It was part of her revenge.

Encore, was shouted lustily by the men, while the ladies sat in delighted enjoyment, if less emphatic in their applause.

Again she stood like a goddess of song smiling and curtsying, while showers of flowers were cast at her feet; and as the echoes of every note fell on his ravished senses her eyes gleamed with unholy triumph at her power, while her heart became as hard as the nether millstone.

He watched her leave the dressing-room,

and fairly rushed to be first to lead her to her carriage.

"You have taken us all by storm to-night," he whispered, ardently. "May I see you to-morrow—I mean alone?"

"Why not?" she asked, in a mocking tone, that made him shiver, it was so metallic—so devoid of feeling.

"You will listen—I mean you will not be too cruel?" he pleaded, agitatedly.

"Come and see," was all she said, then was lost in the darkness. "Clinton, you are lost!" she muttered, as the vehicle spun along towards the Hall, "and my life will be a dreary waste when I pronounce your doom!"

When he was shown into the drawing-room the next day the blinds were drawn down to keep out the fierce rays of the sun.

He glanced around hurriedly in the dim, uncertain light, and was arrested by a half-stifled sob from a slender figure on the couch, whose face was entirely buried in the cushions.

But the fair head told him who it was.

"Miss Alice, what is the matter? Are you in pain?" he asked, anxiously.

The figure did nothing but give vent to more broken convulsive sobs.

His heart was at once filled with compassion for her distress, and he tried to thrust his perfumed handkerchief into her hands to stanch her tears, remembering only that once upon a time he liked her in a calm, platonic fashion. She pressed his hand gratefully and he returned the pressure.

"Dear Alice, what is your grief? May I not, as an old friend, claim the right to comfort—console you?"

"Why mock me with that term, Clinton?" the artful little lady sobbed. "Why stab me to the heart with kindness which only too vividly reminds me of the happy days when no one came between us?" clenching tightly the fingers which clasped her own.

Very gently though firmly he disengaged his hand and said gravely—

"Miss Alice, I regret you should have given yourself pain and humiliation, which I would gladly have spared you, for my heart is dead to all women except one; if I am unfortunate enough not to win her, then I shall go to my grave unloved."

"Alva is the woman!" she exclaimed, furiously, "usurper of my home, and now of you—a wretched adventuress—an Italian confadina—a creature, that your proud mother would despise!"

"Enough!" he retorted, sternly, "the respect I once felt towards you is now cancelled, never to be cemented again. Coarse abuse of one whom I revere I could never pardon!"

"I was crazed! Forget my wild words!" she wailed, alarmed lest he should tell Alva all she had said, to put her on her guard against her pretended friendship. "Do not, I beg, reveal my madness to—Alva!"

"I would not give her such pain as to let her think you possess such hatred towards so trusting a nature, whose very roof you share!"

"Heap reproaches upon my head—I deserve them," she said, plaintively, in very earnest. "You cannot despise me worse than I despise myself, but have some little compassion on one who, you must admit, was actuated by jealousy."

"Say no more. I wish to forget one of the darkest pages of your life—one that I trust will never be forgotten by you!"

With bent head she stole out of the room, abashed at the stern, unrelenting man whom she thought to entrap by a grand coup de main.

Just as she was entering her apartment, her mother intercepted her.

"You have failed!" that lady said, livid with rage at the insult put upon her wilful, spoilt child.

"Ignominiously failed," she repeated,

sullenly. "He shuns me now like some pariah for my pains."

"Then you bungled it again, you silly girl. Why, a weeping beauty to a chivalrous man like Sir Clinton ought to have taken him by storm."

"Nought stands for nothing," she retorted, passionately. "He is a stone to everyone except Alva, whom he worships. She has woven a spell round him strong as iron."

"Why, she has never given him a scrap of encouragement. Her conduct to him is bordering upon rudeness."

"Nevertheless, when a fellow tells you he adores her, I suppose you will at least agree it is no invention of mine, mamma?" this in an injured tone.

"Men are enigmas to me, then," sighed Mrs. George Rintoul. "It seems the more you snub them the greater they admire and fawn upon you. Well, well, it is a sad disappointment, especially as I had hoped to see you settled in an establishment of your own before the inevitable takes place, when Alva is snatched up and the Hall will have a master and we shall be told to leave."

"I wish we were going this very moment. I hate the place; it oppresses me so—stifles me, in fact!"

"Be calm, dear," coaxed her mother, dreading lest the impulsive girl should, in her desperation, throw down rebelliously the mask she had hitherto worn so successfully.

A few minutes after Alice had left Sir Clinton he saw Alva approaching through the conservatory, her hands full of blood-red flowers, like the ones he remembered lay in her small, brown hand that day in Italy which sealed his fate.

He went forward to meet her, his arms open to catch her in a lover's fond embrace, believing the bright blossoms were a token of pardon.

She recoiled back for an instant, and his arms fell to his side, and she held out a cold hand with cutting courtesy, saying—

"Perhaps you would like to see my orchids? Some people say they are very fine."

"All the orchids could never please me like those flowers you have in your hand. They remind me of the past."

"Which I would forget—cast into dark oblivion, if I could," she said, icily.

"Take my miserable life! I will yield it to you—anything but this torture," he groaned. "Heaven knows if I have erred I have suffered!"

"The past is too revolting to my honour as a lady to even mention, much less enlarge upon!"

"What am I to do?" he urged. "If I speak either of the past or present I only seem to fill you with aversion—to wound you. Oh, Alva! do not be too cruel. Such a love as mine is too deadly in earnest to be trampled down in the dust. I wish I loved my Maker as well as I do you! If you spurn me from you, have a care, for you will peril my soul. In Heaven's holy name have some pity for me!"

A deadly pallor crept into her face, while her eyes seemed to burn in their sockets. He was, indeed, probing her to the very soul. Her cold lips formed a hasty prayer for strength to resist him to the bitter end. And she stood for a few moments dumb to him, collecting her scattered senses.

"Give me one of those flowers for a peace offering," he said, breaking the silence.

She permitted him to take one from her rigid fingers.

"Heaven bless you for this, much!" he cried, impulsively, believing she was at last relenting.

A shiver ran through her frame, yet her apathy was unmoved.

At any cost he determined to overcome it.

"Why don't you revile me?" he burst forth, "instead of scolding me. When you drove me from you two years ago, I became a wanderer upon the face of the earth; I drank

to forget, to obtain forgetfulness in wine; then I tried to bask in woman's smiles, but alas, their very beauty filled me with disgust, because they mocked when I sometimes, in my madness, detected a likeness to you. Come, my lost and only love, let not the past rise like a wall of granite between us. Grant me pardon, and be my own dear wife!"

"I think you will admit I have listened patiently to your romantic, I might add extravagant, little speech. Now, perhaps you will oblige me with your attention!" she said in hard, measured tones. "I have decided to remain as I am. Owning no fealty to any man, except my father; the shackles of a wedded life would gall me!"

"Take time to consider. Do not, I implore you, for both our sakes, be too—"

"Cease, Sir Clinton, I have not finished (waving her hand imperiously). I was about to say this is the happiest hour I have known since the crowning insult I received to my womanhood at your hands. I then took a solemn oath to avenge it, how, I knew not; but fate played into my hands, the pall of grim poverty was raised, tardy justice was done, and I became mistress here! We met again, and I saw the way to carry out my vow. You fell into the trap I laid for you. New go, discarded, spurned by the woman you thought it manly to disgrace."

"If I did not love you better than my own soul I would curse you," he said, hollowly. "May Heaven forgive you."

Her face was concealed behind a palm, or he must have seen its distorted misery; the very fountain of life, for one awful moment, seemed stopped at his last words. He leant against the stone pillar. The light from his eyes had faded, and his face was ghastly. For a brief instant remorse seized her, and the wild thought flashed across her confused brain, to fling herself into his arms and plead for forgiveness.

But her good angel had deserted her ere she could put her hasty resolve into practice; with wide open, tearless eyes, full of dumb agony, she watched him pass out, his sunny head bowed, his step laboured and slow, as if the weight of years had suddenly fallen upon him.

"I've done it, I've done it!" she wailed, frantically. "Oh! merciful Heaven, pity me, pity me!" then swayed forward as the palace of flowers revolved around her, and fell on the cocoanut matting in a swoon.

CHAPTER V.

The silent wheel of time sped on, and winter, cheery and ruddy, took the place of sweet smiling summer.

To one inmate of the Hall it was a winter of desolation so fell in its devastating misery that she wished the pure, white snow would close around her and become her shroud, when the fatal news reached her that her father was dead—the result of broken hopes to reinstate himself in the king's favour.

The strain had proved too strong for him, and he sank under the heavy burden of bitter injustice, and died a victim to his own loyalty in trying to right himself. Mrs. George and Alice hovered about her fassily when the blow fell, crushing out all savour of life, all hope for the dark, forbidding future.

"Grief will only weaken you, and cannot bring back the dead," remarked Mrs. Rintoul, with a shrug at the prostrate girl, who lay on her satin-draped bed sobbing out in bitter, convulsive anguish against her desolation, her lonely misery.

"Have pity on me and leave me," she pleaded. "I wish to bear this sorrow alone."

"I only wished to comfort you, my dear girl," she answered, rapidly, shuffling out of the room with her nose elevated skywards.

"The airs and graces she assumes is perfectly ridiculous," she snarled to her daughter later on. "Instead of showing a little grati-

tude for sympathy she ordered me out of her chamber. She has been most shamefully brought up."

"She is as wayward and obstinate as a mule," Alice snapped; "a regular fox and the grapes creature. She lured Sir Clinton from me by her sly artifices, only to drive him out of the country. She's a Ciroe, heartless, and dangerous to men."

A few hours after the news reached Alva of her terrible bereavement she appeared in the drawing-room, clad in sombre black garments ready for travel. Her face was drawn and wan with grief, and dark circles lined her shining eyes, shining with a glassy light foreign to them.

"Where are you going?" Mrs. George asked, literally taken aback with surprise.

"To Italy, to bury my father."

"But surely not alone, Alva?" Mrs. George gasped.

"My maid will accompany me."

"But think of the imprudence of such a step. A young girl travelling alone!" argued that lady, thoroughly scandalised.

"I think of nothing, except one fact, that my dear father is lying alone, childless, wifeless, while I am here in the lap of luxury, leading a profitless, selfish existence, pining for what can never be. My duty is clear, and I mean to do it."

"As you will, my dear. Had you desired my society I would gladly have given you the protection of my presence," this humbly.

Alva was too agitated to note the covert sneer in Mrs. Rintoul's tone.

Both Alice and her mother kissed her with seeming warmth, and soon she was gone on her sorrowful mission.

"The Hall is now ours once more. What would I not give if she would never return!" remarked Alice, with a yawn. "I remember you once boasted you had the power to hurl her from the position of mistress here altogether, but it doesn't seem like it."

"The time was not ripe for my purpose. One barrier is gone now in the death of her father."

"What could he have to do with it?"

"That is my business. You shall know more when my plans are matured."

When Alva returned from her sad errand she seemed quite changed. She was restless, fickle in her movements. It was evident her feelings had suffered a great shock in this loss of her only parent—the one link which bound her to earth now that she too had driven the only man who possessed her heart away, who could have poured the balm of comfort into her bruised spirit.

Mrs. George and Alice were most affectionate in their demeanour to the orphan, almost oppressively so.

"You are kind to me," Alva was wont to say, as her slender fingers would play nervously with her jet chain.

"Is it not my duty as a woman and a Christian to be patient and tender to the fatherless?" Mrs. Rintoul would rejoin, lifting her eyes piously up to Heaven in the most approved fashion, though, could the girl have seen their cold, stony expression, she would have recoiled from her with terror.

Things, however, settled down again at the Hall into the same old groove, and Alva began to get back her wild bloom, her eyes their old lustre, for even grief, like mirth, must have a burial.

She was passing down the grand staircase, her French heels going click-clack on the marble floor, her arms laden with a splendid altar cloth she was embroidering for Mr. Rogers.

"Is that you, dear?" called Mrs. George as she neared the library. "Come in at once. I have found something of vital importance, which you must see."

A thrill of shapeless apprehension, of coming evil, struck a chill to her whole system—why, she could not have explained—as she entered the room to find Mrs. George seated at a table, a letter in her hand, a bundle of papers at her

side, a strange, basilisk expression in her pale, blue eyes.

"Sit down. I am afraid this revelation will shock you, Alva, but it must not remain a secret through any false delicacy on my part."

"Will you explain, please, what you mean?" Alva said, nervously.

"I have found this letter among the late Earl's papers. Be prepared to receive a terrible surprise. Shall I read it?"

"Yes," faltered the girl, with pallid lips, feeling a cold dew, like death, on her brow.

In ill-concealed triumph Mrs. George read out words that scorched into her brain like burning coals of fire and made it dizzy with shame and misery.

"My father's marriage not valid! Oh, this is some horrid dream—some nightmare. Say it is not true!" broke forth from her in dry, choking gasps.

"It was legal enough in Italy, but when a Roman Catholic foreigner marries an English person, there are certain formalities which must take place. Through ignorance or oversight these important forms were neglected, and you are illegitimate by the laws of England, consequently, cannot inherit his property."

There was a deathly silence, the appalling blow seemed too heavy, too devastating in its intensity, for one so proud to bear in an ordinary way. It stifled even tears.

The sweet, high-souled spirit was numbed with humiliation and bitter shame.

At last she held out her trembling, icy hands for the fatal missive, and read the contents for herself.

Each word fell upon her brain like scathing bars of red hot iron; then she said in hard metallic tones as the paper fluttered from her inert fingers on to the rich Turkey carpet, fell messenger of woe, yet white, fair and glossy, emblazoned with a purple and gold crest, as if to jeer at her by its gaudiness.

"It is evidently too true, for this is my grandfather's writing."

"You are satisfied, then?"

"Yes, Mrs. George, I am; and may Heaven forgive them all for this cruel wrong."

Not another word did she utter, but walked with a firm step, as if she had garnered up all her remaining strength to retain her outward fortitude so that this woman should never know how deep the iron had entered her soul.

"She took it as easy as possible. Perhaps she means to fight the question!" Mrs. Rintoul thought somewhat anxiously, as she hastened to the dining-room, gleaming from head to foot in her favourite jet ornaments, that rustled as she walked like a coat of mail.

When the dinner appeared, a message was sent down by Alva to say she was not well enough to preside, so the lady took the head of the table, her daughter the bottom.

When the servants had retired, Mrs. George observed,—

"I have reason to believe we shall retain our position here for good, that, in fact, we shall no longer be compelled to figuratively sit below the salt."

"You must be joking, mamma; for gracious sake don't be absurd."

"Absurd or not, it is as true as Holy Writ. I shall be undisputed mistress of Rintoul from to-day, and Alva Marcello resumes her name of Marcello, and sinks back again into obscurity."

"By what means can all this be effected; the Earl's will was properly drawn up, wasn't it?"

"Do not pester me with questions, child; be satisfied that I know what I am about for your interests and my own."

"But it seems so incredible," urged Alice, her eyes glistening with intense excitement.

"Truth is generally more marvellous than any conception spun from the brain of a novelist. Rintoul is ours if we are careful. She is very high-minded and proud, and I fancy would shrink from the publicity of liti-

gation, as her dead parents are involved in the question; you must take her in hand and persuade her not to drag the honour of the family into a court; advise secrecy."

"How am I to do that when I am kept in the dark as to the real facts, mamma?" she asked sullenly.

"It all lies in a nut-shell; after all, it seems that her parents were not married according to our English law, and I have found it out."

"And she believes it?" Alice queried.

"How can she refute it when I showed her a letter of the late Earl's denouncing her dead mother as the mistress only of that Italian adventurer?"

"Had it been my case I should defy a trumpery letter," she retorted; "being declared by the will to be the rightful owner."

"That would not have daunted me, for I should have placed it in the hands of a sharp solicitor who would soon bring her down from her high horse."

"Then I would have destroyed it. She is certainly not made of the same material as I."

"She providentially is not so unscrupulous," her mother said with a tinge of sarcasm, for bad as she was herself she was not quite satisfied with her only child's lack of honour and principle.

A frown flew to the girl's face at the reproach in her mother's voice.

"I am what you made me," she pointed; "when I wish to act fair and straight you always jeer me."

"You are a very ungrateful girl to upbraid me like this, considering it is for your sake I have erred," she returned angrily; "it is always the way with you to taunt me when I fail, and insult me when I succeed."

"This is no time to bicker, mamma," Alice said in a wheedling voice, seeing her mother was getting in one of her nasty tempers; "you said just now that Alva's father was not rightfully wedded to her mother; in that case she is a person unfit for me to associate with, and if you can prove that fact, it would only be right to me to request her to find another home," pursing up her thin lips in virtuous severity at the fearful thoughts of coming in hourly contact with one who was as fair in nature and her soul's purity as a saint, who would have died rather than commit a mean act.

"It would never do to turn her out," Mrs. George said swiftly; "there is room enough for her; you of course will take her place, she yours."

"I will never have a girl of her origin near me; besides, she attracts all the men by her sly tricks and baits. Faugh! I should have a mean spirit to permit a nameless creature who has usurped already my rights under false pretences, to be on friendly terms with me; if you have no proper pride, I have."

"You talk stupidly, child; the most difficult thing in the world is to upset a will. Remember too, that 'possession is nine points of the law.' How do we know she will not contest the question raised. You permit your jealousy to overcome caution!"

"I hate her!" she snapped, her round, doll-like eyes flashing venomously. "Didn't she win the love of Sir Clinton away from me—the dark-faced gipsy!"

"All will be lost if you persist in being rash!" Mrs. George said firmly. "You must forget him, and try to secure another baronet. There's Sir Timothy Hales; I am sure you could get him, if you liked."

"An old fossil, shrivelled up like some monkey!"

"Fossil or not, he possesses a capital rental."

"Which he can keep!" she answered partly. "I am not disposed to be tied to a mummy. Why, the men will flock around me like bees around a honey-pot when it gets known I am an heiress. There is no reason why I shouldn't marry an Earl or even a duke!"

Mrs. George thought so too, as she glanced

into the girl's bright young face, fresh and fair with youth's soft bloom which hid the defects of her cunning, small mind, while the lines were rounded with pearly flesh, blended with the damask rose petal.

The following morning Alva took her accustomed seat at the urn.

There was a deep, sombre light in her eyes, a calm dignity in her manner, which surprised Mrs. George and Alice, who expected to see a face swollen by the ravages of a night spent in tears, and bitter abject lamentations at the stigma cast upon her by her reckless parents.

She ate sparingly it was true; yet it seemed she relished the tempting morsels of grilled ham as usual.

Both mother and daughter shot looks of apprehension across the table. They were struck with a mortal fear lest their air-built castles should tumble in jagged fragments around their heads, and pierce them in their descent.

A gloomy silence fell on the trio, a kind of lull before a gathering storm, though the elder lady nibbled her crisp toast with assumed unconcern.

At last, like all things, happy or otherwise, the repast concluded. Then Alva rose from the snowy draped table and said quietly,—

"Come into my boudoir, Mrs. Rintoul, for a few moments. I will not detain you longer!"

"Certainly, my dear!" the lady said, quickly, though the colour rushed from her face even to her lips.

"May I not come too?" gasped the wily Alice. "If it's to be a family conclave you mustn't leave little me out in the cold."

"My business is with your mother, Alice," was the firm reply, motioning the girl back imperiously.

"Nasty cat, I'll teach you to snub me!" she snarled, clenching her hands wrathfully at the retreating girl.

"I wished to speak to you alone," Alva commenced, "because I cannot discuss my dead father or mother before a third party. Heaven knows my cup of humiliation is full to the brim already. Last night I spent battling with ambition and the sweets which only wealth and name can bring, but I have won—won, for the sake of two dear, dead names; all I possess I will relinquish in yours and Alice's favour. It is not mine, and the penance for my parents' error shall be the sacrifice of all I possess in the world, under one condition."

"What is that? Name it," put in her astounded listener, in hard, panting breaths.

"Never to reveal the reason of this decision to living soul; to permit me to go out of your lives as if I had never existed."

"But what will the world say at this strange step? People will talk, you know."

"You must give out that an informality was found in the will of my late grandfather, and that I have gone abroad. It will only be a nine days' wonder, and will die out."

"This is a noble resolve," Mrs. George exclaimed, the girl's grand nature forcing even a tribute of admiration from her deceitful lips.

"I should be false to those I love and revere if I perpetuated so grievous a wrong to you and Alice. My grandfather, in a revulsion of feeling, forgot his feud against us, and made that last will, forgetful of the sad mistake papa made in his young days. To contest this letter would be to hurl everyone concerned in it in ignominy and shame, myself included. You see, I have well weighed the consequences; the conflict was sharp and bitter, but peace has returned to me with resignation."

Her lovely face became radiant, illumined with the holy calm of a chastened soul, from which selfishness and self was purged.

"Had I such a child," thought the abased woman—abased in her own conscience—"I believe I could bear poverty, even disgrace; and in the momentary gush of human feeling she said, almost tenderly,—

"My dear Alva, you will let me consider

your interests. It is the least I can do when you surrender all to us."

"As I came so I must leave. I have no claim upon you, neither will I accept charity," she answered, quietly. "And please ask me no further questions. To-morrow I shall bid good-bye to Rintoul for ever."

Awed by the majesty of her mien—latent, as it was, with a sweet, saint-like resignation—she became dumb, unable to urge even her wish to befriend her.

So grand a nature inspired her with a reverential dread over which she had no control; and she permitted the girl to leave the room without a word of protest.

Such gross natures, at a supreme moment, are powerless to cope with pure ones, though it might be their salvation if they could inhale the Heaven-sent dew into their warped hearts.

True to her word, the next day Alva took her leave of Mrs. Rintoul and her daughter.

A couple of trunks, containing only her mourning and a few cherished trinkets bequeathed her by her mother, was all she had packed, which a porter from the little rural station carried away on a truck as unostentatiously as if it were the luggage of a domestic only.

Calm as she appeared, her heart throbbed with a thousand pangs of deep agony at the last, when she stood with eyes wide open but with mute despair in their depths, murmuring a last good-bye to the inanimate though living relics that Clinton, the man she had spurned, had touched or used.

There was the rush chair he always sat in when he smoked in the conservatory, and the bright blossoms he was so passionately fond of were mockingly nodding at her, and every petal seemed to her like huge drops of blood.

In that moment of pitious wretchedness she would have sacrificed ten years of her life to see him once again, to know for certain she had not driven him to despair, to perhaps seek rest in a suicide's grave.

Then her worn eyes wandered to the windows, to the grand stretch of undulating country, to the woodlands, the tender green hollows and glades where she had strolled with him; she, glorying in her pride at being the mistress of it all.

Now what was she? An outcast, a poor, nameless wail, whose assumption of grandeur was a sham, a base lie; and he was avenged in this hour of her remorse and anguish.

"I wish you would tell me where you are going, Alva," Mrs. George stammered, "so that I could befriend you if you were in trouble," real concern in her face.

"Thanks! You are very kind, and I am grateful; but I wish to be forgotten, to drop out of your lives; it is better so," she answered brokenly, tears at last welling into her eyes, for this womanly offer to act as a friend to her opened the fount which had remained dry while she was yielding up only worldly possessions.

"I am sure we shall miss you very very much," chimed in Alice, stepping forward to shake hands. "And—and mamma, I know, does not wish you to leave; but there, I dare say it would be painful for you to play a kind of second fiddle to little me."

"This is no time for flippancy," her mother interposed, reprovingly.

A shrug of derision was her answer, and in another moment the sweet, gracious young mistress passed into the hall out into the long, leafless avenue.

A shiver of wretched agony crept to her desolate heart as she made her way on foot to the station.

No sound broke the death-like stillness, save the melancholy bark of a dog, and she glided up the winding road shivering, it is true, at the grim prospect before her, though her brain was alert and active with a spirit of reckless daring that overcame bodily weakness.

"How bitterly sharp and cutting the wind is," she thought, as she gathered her cloak tightly around her shoulders and chest. "It

is in unison with my hopes and future, at least."

The welcome sight of the little, red built station gave her fresh courage to increase her speed, glad to escape from the cruel east wind, which seemed to penetrate into her flesh venomously.

She hurried through, obtained a ticket, and very soon was flying through the deep cuttings and dismal tunnels to the great human beehive—London—where she cared not, so that she could escape from the thralldom which galled her to the quick, and hide her young head from every creature who had ever known her.

Fortune favoured her for a while through her splendid voice and knowledge of music, which enabled her to get a few pupils, but the neighbourhood—Camden Town—which her scanty funds only afforded, made the remuneration very inadequate to her deserts.

But she bore up with a brave young heart through a severe, long winter, trudging through the snow and slush to give her lessons to her little pupils, with generally a sad, though winning smile on her wan face when they greeted her.

How gladly she hailed the first glimpse of sun, the sweet twittering of the birds up in the budding trees. As she passed the trim villa gardens, with their snowdrops and many-coloured tulips, it seemed like a new lease of life and hope to the poor, friendless orphan, who yearned for the sunny skies of her native land.

CHAPTER VI.

It was a grand September afternoon, one of those serene, tranquil ones which frequently follow a showery morning.

The yellow corn in the meadows waved its golden sheaves saucily after its bath, scattering sparkling showers over the glowing poppies and blue corn flowers.

Never had Rintoul Hall been more delightful, so thought Alice, who was looking as fresh and radiant as the rose-bud she was stooping to rifle from its parent stem.

Her cheeks had a soft, peachy tint, that shone up beside the pure white Indian gown she wore, its only ornament a bunch of deep red carnations fixed in her white satin waistband.

A horse's hoofs crunching the gravel path arrested her attention. She glanced up swiftly to see Sir Clinton entering the avenue, leading his horse by the bridle.

She held out her hand, all twinkling and glittering in the sunlight with gems, in a half shy, half pert, little fashion, and babbled out,—

"Why, Sir Clinton, you are such a stranger that I could not believe it possible to be you!"

"I have been roaming about, as usual," he said, "till I became home sick. I hope Mrs. George and Miss Rintoul are quite well. I need not ask you, for I never saw you looking brighter."

She bobbed him a little playful courtesy, replying,—

"Mamma is not quite the thing, and Miss Rintoul I cannot answer for."

"Why?" he asked swiftly.

"Well, you see, she is not living here now!"

He grasped the mane of his horse to steady himself, as the fearful thought seized him that she had, perhaps, married, and so was lost to him for all eternity, and gasped out tremulously,—

"Not here! What do you mean?"

"You had better come in and see mamma. These family matters are out of my line, you know!" This with an aggravating little moue that made him boil with impatient rage.

"Tell me now. I must and will know!" he thundered, grasping her dimpled hand in a vice-like grip that speedily took the saucy smirk out of her face, and made her flinch with the pain.

"I cannot tell you anything except she is not living here," she answered, doggedly.

"Is she—she married?" he persisted, his voice quivering with the agony of suspense and keen anxiety.

"How should I know, since she never writes or communicates with us. She left Rintoul a few months after you started upon your travels."

He was bewildered at this strange intelligence; it seemed so improbable that the mistress of so fair a domain should leave it in so unaccountable a manner.

In a dazed, dreamy state he permitted a groom to lead away his horse, and followed the white-clad girl with her hands full of roses just plucked, on to the terrace into the summer drawing-room, where they found Mrs. George snugly curled upon a cool rush couch, her gleaming head of reddish-gold resting on a purple satin cushion.

She rose on their entrance with a yawn which she quickly stifled when she saw the visitor was Sir Clinton.

"This is indeed a pleasure," she remarked. "We really began to fancy you had been eaten by tigers or savages, or something, not hearing a grain of news of you."

"Before I explain the cause of my silence I should be grateful to you if you would be good enough to inform me where Miss Rintoul is, and why she is not here now?"

"It is a long story."

"Make it brief, please!" he pleaded, anxiously.

"Well, you see, she would not stay, though I begged her to do so. It appears that poor Alva was not legally the inheritor of Rintoul, or, in fact, of any of the property. It was found out quite by accident, and she refused to hold it and perpetuate a wrong to us, the rightful heirs."

"This is all very singular. Pray may I ask if she has gone back to Italy?" he said, dazed with astonishment.

"That I cannot say, for her father is dead," she rejoined.

"Dead!" he repeated, mechanically, "then she is alone—alone indeed. This is terrible, horrible!"

"It was no fault of mine," put in Mrs. George, deprecatingly. Alva was always self-willed. I am sure there was no need for her to leave us."

"Had she any income—any means?" he asked.

"None that I am aware of. But suppose we drop the subject; it is not a pleasant one to me."

"To me it is torture," he replied, his brow contracted with indignation, "to think that a young, lovely woman should be cast upon a hard, relentless world, friendless in every sense; it is revolting!"

"You seem to infer, Sir Clinton, that I was to blame," she returned, in an injured tone. "Really, it is too bad to make me responsible for a hot-headed, impulsive girl!"

"I know not who is to blame, I only know I am distracted, blind to reason."

Alice listened to the conversation from a milking-stool, where she had cast herself in a fascinating attitude, with a pitiless smile on her face, a hard glitter in her eyes that looked as greenish as a lizard's.

"Come, let us have a stroll in the grounds, Sir Clinton, and forget this doleful subject," chirped Alice, rising and catching hold of his arm.

"You must excuse me," he replied, idly. "Neither rest nor happiness will be mine till I find Miss Rintoul."

"Love-sick fool! I haven't patience with him," she thought, chagrined at his refusal.

"Where can I go to seek her?" Sir Clinton muttered, his face pale and set with pain as he cantered away from the mansion. "My sweet, high-souled Alva! my beautiful martyr!"

He dashed on, digging his spurs ruthlessly into his unhappy steed's flanks, dead to all the enticing sights of the glad autumn

afternoon, with a passionate craving tearing at his heart-strings to find his lost love, even if she spurned him afterwards.

That evening he was a passenger in the express to London, bent upon his quest to find Alva.

The excitement which he was under held him in so strong a spell that neither his mind or body seemed to know any feeling of fatigue.

The fast flying train seemed to crawl; the seconds on his repeater, which he kept part of the time open in his hand, appeared hours.

When at last the great black iron demon tore through the glass-covered station, he sprang up with almost a shout of relief, for it seemed to him in his fevered imagination that he must be near his lost one.

At nine o'clock the following morning he was sitting in the inquiry office of a noted private detective.

"Do you think you will be able to help me in this search?" Sir Clinton asked, after he had explained all to the attentive, sorrow-faced man.

"I can only promise you, Sir Clinton, all the aid my experience can suggest. You see the young lady may not be in London at all, or even in England. You say her native place is Italy; it appears to me that she is as likely to go there as remain here, where it seems she has no friends."

The hope which had buoyed him up entirely collapsed at this wise reasoning; it made his heart sink below zero.

"Search London first, then try Italy," the Baronet remarked after a pause; "money is no object. Here is an earnest," putting on the oak table notes to the value of a hundred pounds.

"He's a stunning client and no mistake," the detective said with a chuckle; "and I hope I'll track this little lady down. It won't be my fault if I don't succeed."

No rest or real happiness visited the unhappy young Baronet with this carking anxiety always before him, that the woman he loved with a never-dying love was exposed to poverty and unspeakable dangers in the seething, cruel, sea-like wilderness of our great city.

One morning he strolled through the park, a cigar in his mouth, a favourite custom of his to throw off as far as he was able the vapours as he called them.

Seeing it was fast filling, and in no humour to chat or dally with his numerous acquaintances, he quitted it by the first exit near to him—Albert Gate.

Outside St. George's Hospital there was a big crowd.

"What's the matter?" he asked of a constable.

"A child run over, sir," he replied indifferently, as if a child more or less was of very small consequence to him.

"Poor little thing," Sir Clinton said mentally; "some street arab, I suppose, who tempted fate once too often by hanging on to the wheels of some cart or carriage."

Had he passed by half an hour later he would have seen Alva descend the hospital steps with a child in her arms, accompanied by a young woman whose face was swollen and blistered by crying.

Alva, though anything but well-dressed, yet looked the refined gentlewoman she was, for hardships and grim poverty had in nowise tarnished her beauty, in fact, had spiritualized it.

With infinite tenderness she carried her small burden, murmuring soft words of tender endearment to pacify it, while the little fellow gazed with his large brown eyes into his lovely preserver's with a wealth of childish trust and gratitude.

"Oh, miss!" implored the unhappy nurse, "you won't be too hard on me and tell my master I was to blame. My character will be gone if you do."

"I have no wish to injure you," Alva said gravely. "I did not see the first of the

accident—not till the darling child was under the horses' hoofs!"

The heroic part she had played in the affair deserves some mention.

She had been to see a lady about some singing lessons and had the misfortune of finding her out, and was returning home, jaded and disappointed with fatigue, and was about to enter the park to rest her weary feet when she stood almost petrified for a moment in wild horror at the sight of a child, who, heedless of his peril, dashed through a surging crowd of carriages just pouring into the gates by Apsley House.

She saw the white-frooked little fellow, with his sunny head of curls, run forward mad with fear at his danger to be caught by a pair of grays that seemed to engulf him entirely from her sight.

"He will be killed!" she gasped in a frenzy of horror as once more the glitter of his golden head and white frock became visible beneath the horses' iron hoofs.

Impelled by the courage of a Grace Darling, flinging all thought of self-preservation aside, she set herself together and plunged forward and literally dragged the child from beneath the restive quivering horse's legs, while the panic-struck spectators looked on sick with dread lest the brave, dauntless girl should fall a victim to her courageous humanity and so double the catastrophe.

But an ever-watchful One aided her task—a task so dangerous that strong men fell back with a shudder, and women hid their faces.

Then there arose a roar, hoarse, yet triumphant, as she emerged perfectly unscathed, with the boy, whose injuries, when seen by the surgeons, were pronounced slight, and were speedily attended to, and orders given to remove him immediately home to quiet his nerves, which of course were shaken by the shock.

"This is the house, miss," the nurse said, in a quivering voice of apprehension, as they stopped at a handsome residence in Cadogan Square.

When in the drawing-room, Alva could not help glancing around at its beauty, and the un-English taste displayed in its furniture and appointments.

Never out of her own sunny land had she seen such warm glowing tints and daring contrasts, yet making a grand harmonious whole.

A flood of sweet memories rushed upon her of tangled mosses and deep red flowers when she met her fate and forgot the world in a deathless love.

"My child, my child," cried a sweet voice, tremulous with piteous agony, "come to your own mamma."

Alva saw a woman of wondrous beauty, a pale haze of yellow hair framing her face, which was the loveliest she had ever seen.

A pearl grey robe, clouded with cascades of soft lace, fell in wavelets around her, clasped at the waist by a belt of brilliant red garnets.

"Do not be alarmed. Your darling is unhurt; see!" Alva said, tenderly, placing the boy in its mother's arms.

When the lady had assured herself there was really no very serious harm done, she overwhelmed Alva with thanks, she even took her in her arms and kissed her again and again in the overflow of her gratitude.

When calmness was restored, Mrs. Celli said animatedly,—

"You are not English, surely?"

"No; I was born in Italy."

"Then you are a countrywoman of my husband. He is an artist; all these pictures were painted by him," eying with pride the splendid works of art that looked down from their frames to challenge even nature by their perfectness.

"I thought I recognised that nameless, wondrous contrast of colours so foreign to English homes when I first entered the room; the very atmosphere seemed to bring back dear old Italy to me," she answered, wistfully.

"How doubly pleased my husband will be to learn he owes the life of our precious boy

to one of his own nationality, for he dearly loves his people, though he has made his home in England and married an English woman."

Alva thought she had never met a woman so truly charming, her whole heart was drawn irresistibly towards her.

Before she bade Alva good-night, Mrs. Celli remarked with earnest feeling,—

"Look upon me as your friend. Both my husband and I owe you a debt that no worldly consideration can ever cancel."

"You owe me nothing. I should not hesitate to do the same this instant if a child's life was in the like danger. My hot, impulsive nature cannot stay to think or plan; I simply forget all in a torrent of wild desire to save, and in this case succeeded."

Mrs. Celli's last words of proffered friendship were very dear to the desolate girl, yet her pride forbade her revealing the sad truth of her daily battle for a mere existence. She shrank from baring the scars of her misfortunes to the outside world, and passed out of the house with head erect and a smile that was infinitely touching in its very sweetness.

(To be concluded in our next.)

FACETIÆ.

MR. OLDREAU (slightly deaf): "Darling, how your heart beats to-night! Is it because I have proposed?" Sophia: "What you hear, sweetest, is the servant pumping water to the third floor."

THINKS ONE WOULD RATHER HAVE LEFT UNSAID. Miss Margaret: "Pray sit down. I'm so sorry mamma and my sisters are out. Shy Curate (who has called on parish business): "Oh, pray don't mention it. One of the family is quite enough."

MANY A husband is lost in wonder as he reflects that the glowing hand which spans his children and serves up his cabbage is the very same to which he used to write sonnets, and which he never kissed without a sense of reverence amounting to rapture.

TOURIST (to stage-driver in the Yellowstone region): "Are there any wonderful curiosities to be seen in this region, driver?" Stage driver: "Wonderful curiosities! Well, I should say there were! Why, you drop a rock down that gorge, come back in three days, and you can hear the echo."

BARBER (to customer): "Oil, sir?" Customer (emphatically): "No!" Barber: "You are right, sir. None of our best people are using oil on their hair now-a-days." (To next customer): "Oil, sir?" Customer: "Why, yes, I suppose so. Proper thing, isn't it?" Barber: "Yes, sir. All our best people are using oil on their hair now-a-days."

THE mother was taking violent exercise in the shape of playing one of Wagner's most athletic pieces on the piano—covering the whole length of the keyboard, crossing hands, and really putting in some very conscientious work. The child watched the performance intently, but with a puzzled air. When peace was declared, and the active combatant turned round, the little girl gravely asked: "Mamma, were you playing something, or were you dusting?"

"Yes," said a grave gentleman the other day, as he sat down to a dinner-table where there were already twelve diners, "there is one occasion, decidedly, when thirteen people at table is a sign of bad luck." "When is that, please?" "When there is only enough to eat for twelve." "And what about upsetting the salt-cellar?" "Oh, that is unlucky too, when you upset it in a dish that's just to your liking." Perhaps it may have been accidents of this sort that set these superstitions going originally. Once started, there is no end of plausible ways in which a superstition can be justified, and no end of people who will declare that they have known it to "come true."

PRUDENCE.—Wife: "Shall I put your diamond studs in your shirt, dear?" Husband: "What on earth are you thinking of? Do you want to ruin me? I have a meeting of my creditors this morning."

SCENE in the reporters' room. Seven reporters at seven desks. Enter a lady. Lady: "Can I see the handsome reporter who called at my house yesterday?" Seven Reporters (rising with seven smiles): "Yes, ma'am."

GOOD WATER.—At a hotel in Leamington, last summer, a traveller asked the waiter if the waters they were drinking were saline waters. "Well, sir," the waiter replied, "they are very good for rowin', but as for sallin', they ain't much."

BOARDER (heatedly to landlady): "Madam, I have just found one of the blackest of hairs in my soup. This is outrageous!" Landlady (snappishly): "Oh, outrageous, is it? Well, if you think I'm going to hire a red-headed cook just to suit your taste you're mistaken. It's black hair or none for the present."

IN an opera box. Young Wife (to her husband, who wishes her to excuse him for a few moments): "No objection to your going out to 'see a man,' as you call it, Charles; but if you are going to be gone as long as you were the last time, please send some good-looking man to see me." Charles concludes not to go.

TAILOR: "Why is it that you don't pay for that suit? I have called here repeatedly, and all I can get is promises." Young Actor: "Well, you know all the papers call me a promising young comedian." "Yes, but promises are not performances." "Well, come up to the theatre any night, and you will see my performances."

PROPRIETOR of glove shop (just returned from a trip): "How is this? I hear not a customer has been in the place for a week." Head Man (helplessly): "I know it. After you left I did my best to boom business. I even put a big card in the window saying we could fit the biggest hands going, but not a lady has entered."

PAINTER (who is looking for work, and has pestered Mrs. Hobson beyond endurance: "The fence, madam, needs a coat of paint very badly." Mrs. Hobson (impatiently to servant): "Show this man the front door at once, James." "Ah, this looks like business. I'll paint that door for you, madam, in good style for five shillings."

SOMETHING WAS DAMAGED.—Mrs. Dolliver: "Oh, Henry, I have dropped the flower-pot out of the window, and I saw it light on an elderly man!" Mr. Dolliver (turning pale): "Great Heavens, Jane! You don't know what damage you may have caused!" Mrs. Dolliver (in tears): "Yes, I do. It's pure china, and can't be replaced for less than two guineas. Oh, what shall I do?"

Mrs. SMITH (making a purchase for Mrs. Smith, who has instructed him to get her a pair of three and a half): "Let me see a pair of ladies' five, wide." Shopman (who knows the Smiths): "Why, Mr. Smith, your wife always orders three and a half." "Young man, I am not going to suffer the tortures of the infernal regions every morning watching that woman trying to get a bushel of feet into a peck of shoes. I am going to take her a pair that will fit her."

JUVENILE LOGIC.—They were too little chums at school, and they were discussing family affairs. One of them was a little bit of a child, and the other a great, strong girl, although they were both of one age. "You can't think," said the little mite, "you can't think how hard my papa works to keep me at this school. Oh, he works ever so hard!" "You should see my mamma work!" said the other. "Yes, but that's different." "No it ain't. She makes all my dresses and all my clothes." "But my papa has three times as much to work for, and he works so hard." "Yes, but I'm as big as three of you!"

SOCIETY.

THE Prince of Wales and every single Prince of the English Royal Family at present in England, attended the memorial service for the Crown Prince of Austria at the church in Farm-street by Her Majesty's express wish, and the master of military, diplomatic, and ecclesiastical "full uniforms" made is a most gorgeous function in spite of its melancholy character. The Prince wore the hussar jacket and red trousers of his Hungarian regiment, and carried the white and gold shako in his hand. Prince Albert Victor looked very well in the uniform of the 10th Hussars, and Prince George of Wales was resplendent in his naval captain's blue cloth and gold epaulettes.

THE Empress Frederick, says a contemporary, has had some new dresses made. They are by no means so dowdy as one would imagine "widows' weeds" must necessarily appear. There is a dinner robe, Princess shape, of crepe, with a handsome front panel of black satin; the body is ornamented with stars of onyx, and the tucker and cuffs of white crepe are caught up by similar stars formed into brooches. Another dress is of black velvet deeply trimmed with jet and crepe; an outdoor mantle is of crepe cloth lined and trimmed with black astrachan.

MISS LOUISE MUNNIE, who has just been married at the Oratory to Lord William Nevill, is not positively pretty, but is a great heiress, her parents being very successful Spanish merchants, who have recently been ennobled as Marquis and Marchioness de Santurce. Lord William is the fourth son of the Marquis of Abergavenny, but was not recognised by his father on becoming a Catholic. His conversion is said to be indirectly due to Viscount Castlerosse, who induced him to go to a Roman Catholic church at Melbourne when he was visiting Sir Henry Loche, whose aide-de-camp Lord Castlerosse was, and this event is said to have led to a train of questionings, which eventually resulted in his joining the Church of Rome.

THE Marquis of Dufferin and Ava will receive the freedom of the City of London on Wednesday, May 29, in recognition of his distinguished public services. The ceremony will take place in the Guildhall. The same evening the Lord Mayor will entertain His Excellency at a banquet at the Mansion House.

THE Bicester and Marden Hill Hunt Ball took place at Bicester in due course. Every precaution had been taken to make it a perfect success—a new floor had been specially laid down for the evening, and a supper-room was built out, which was a great improvement on the small, ill-ventilated room upstairs used before for the purpose. The whole of the arrangements had been superintended by Lady Ochebarn, wife of the popular master of the Bicester Hunt, but his Lordship was unfortunately prevented from being present, owing to a fall which he had with the hounds on the Monday previous. The ballroom was beautifully decorated and lighted throughout with wax lights, and dancing was kept up throughout the evening in a more than usually spirited manner. There were a great many pretty dresses. Lady Rose Leigh wore white and silver with a mauve sash. Lady Chesham, a white tulle dress with a silver brocade bodice trimmed with silver; she had magnificent diamonds. A charming dress was an uncommon shade of mauve, the skirt of tulle, very long and full, the bodice of mauve and white striped silk, made quite plainly, but fitting to perfection.

AN *al fresco* fair and floral *fete* on a grand scale will be held at the Royal Albert Hall on May 29th next and two following days in aid of the funds of the Grosvenor Hospital for Women and Children, Vincent-square, S.W., for the rebuilding of which a sum of £25,000 is required.

STATISTICS.

THERE are 62,000 women in America interested in the cultivation of fruit, and there are numbered among them some of the most successful orchardists of California. Women indeed, are more successful than men. It is one of the most healthful occupations, there being no cramping in close rooms, and the physical exertion is not severe.

THE population of Switzerland consists of 2,926,000 souls, according to the census just taken, and which shows that the increase has been less than 100,000 since 1880, much to the concern of the authorities. Emigration is one of the causes, having risen to 5 per cent., in Canton Berne alone within the last decade, while the low birthrate is another reason, the percentage rate-having declined from 39.5 per cent. to 31.4 per cent.

FRENCH railways are reported to be suffering from competition with canals. So acute has the situation become that the railways are demanding the reimposition of the tolls taken off the canal traffic in 1880. In that year the French Government abolished taxation upon canal and river transport, with the result that the total carriage increased from 1,875,000,000 tons carried a kilometre in 1880, to 3,073,000,000 tons carried a similar distance in 1887. In the same period, it is estimated, transport by the main lines of the French railway system fell off from 10,064,000,000 tons per kilometre in 1880, to 8,967,000,000 tons in 1887.

GEMS.

BE courageous and noble-minded; our own hearts and not other men's opinions of us, form our true honour.

OMNIPOTENCE alone can turn the current of the human heart, and change the wonted ebbing and flowing of the tide of human affairs.

IN the mass of human affairs there is nothing so vain and transitory as the fancied pre-eminence which depends on popular opinion without a solid foundation to support it.

TO ensure long life recreation should be a part of our daily life. It makes the busy man thoughtful and the thoughtful man busy. It ensures success, health, and the accomplishment in less time of more and better work.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

RAISIN PUDDING.—One-half cup of treacle, one cup of milk, one cup of raisins, one-half cup of butter, two eggs, two cups flour, two teaspoonfuls of baking powder. Steam one hour.

TEA BISCUIT.—Dissolve one rounded tablespoonful of butter in a pint of hot milk; when lukewarm stir in one quart of flour, add one beaten egg, a little salt, and a teaspoon of yeast; work the dough until smooth. If in winter set in a warm place, if in summer a cool place to rise. In the morning work softly, and roll out a half-inch thick, cut into biscuits, and set to rise thirty minutes, when they will be ready to bake.

HAIR.—If the cover is removed from soap dishes the soap will not get soft. Use charcoal to broil with. The flames close the pores quickly, and make the meat very tender. Silver can be kept bright for months by being placed in an air-tight case with a good-sized piece of camphor. Mahogany and cherry furniture often gets dull for want of a good cleaning with a moist cloth. Polish with the hand, rubbing well, and the result will be surprising. Windows can be cleaned in winter and the frost entirely removed by using a gill of alcohol to a pint of hot water. Clean quickly, and rub dry with a warm chamois skin.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A GIRL is not an "old maid" now until she is past thirty. Once she was an "old maid" at twenty-five. In the better circles girls do not enter society at as early an age as they did when the tag "old maid" was affixed to them if they didn't marry by the time they were twenty-five. The lass of sixteen, eighteen or even older, is in school occupied with her music and other studies now, and not receiving beaux alone in the parlour evenings. The largely increasing number of independently situated women who prefer to live unmarried is likely to work a decided change in the status of the "old maid."

THE regrets caused by our own folly or incapacity are among the most painful to endure. A girl by some act of waywardness has lost her lover; a man by his careless conduct has missed a post that might have led to fame and fortune. A word, a look, an unjust suspicion, has broken hearts before now; and many a person, owing to a fatal error in youth, has walked ever afterward in the valley of humiliation. There is no comfort in feeling you will act more wisely another time, for that other time never comes. You have no more powder in your flask, no more arrows in your quiver; and now you are left to bear as best you may the consciousness of defeat.

A RELIABLE CASHIER.—The Siamese ape is said to be in great demand among Siamese merchants as a cashier in their counting-houses. Vast quantities of base coin obtain circulation in Siam, and the faculty of discriminating between good money and bad would appear to be possessed by these gifted monkeys in such an extraordinary degree of development, that no human being, however carefully trained, can compete with them. The cashier ape meditatively puts into his mouth each coin presented to him in business payments, and tests it with grave deliberation. His method of testing is regarded in commercial circles as infallible; and, as a matter of fact, his decision is uniformly accepted by all parties interested in the transaction.

A WOMAN'S WORK.—In the reign of good Queen Beas of England, there lived a young student at Cambridge by the name of Will Lee, whose home was in Woodborough, in Norfolk. Somewhat given to maidens he was, as well as mathematics; and although he procured his M.A., was much addicted to a pretty and honest lassie who plied the trade of knitting stockings, then much in demand, on account of Queen Elizabeth's very natural and commendable preference of knitting silk to cloth. Now this honest Cambridge girl kept her head very properly straight amid the temptations of this old college town, and refused to let it be turned by the seductive blandishments of the smooth-tongued student. Not she; she cared less than the value of a dropped stitch for the sort of love this Will Lee brought her, and told him as much. "Ay, marry!" said the enraged lover; "then thou shalt rue thy words and thy contempt!" And Master Lee was true to his word; and setting his revengeful and clever brain to working, it was not long before he actually invented a stocking frame, taught all his gentle friends the trade, and set up a factory at Calverton, in Nottinghamshire, made stockings for the maiden queen and her lovers, and took all the poor knitter's trade away. All the hand-knitters were in despair, and rising together drove Master Will across the sea to Rouen, where he drove a roaring trade, but he was finally overtaken by punishment and misfortune, through the confusion which followed the assassination of Henry IV., and which broke up the trade, till finally the inventor died in Paris, poorer than the humble maiden whose character he had tried to ruin. And so the "mills of the gods" finally ground small the stocking frame and its inventor, and it was left to after-time to revise the trade once more.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BROWNIE.—You can certainly be forced to pay.

T. M.—We cannot advertise tradesmen's addresses.

LIZZIE.—Decidedly eccentric, but plain and well-formed.

DIAMOND RING.—We are not acquainted with the ring flirtation.

A. J. C.—Copyright property is not the sole property of the purchaser. Freehold is the more valuable of the two.

A. C. R.—1. Short hair is not now at all fashionable. It never was elegant, though it suits some faces. 2. Pretty good.

A LEAMINGTON READER.—Half a pint of beef tea cold in the morning is the best strengthening of the voice we are acquainted with.

H. H. C.—1. Card playing for money may be played in a private house. 2, 3 and 4. A policeman on duty is not allowed to do any of the things mentioned.

A DUTCH GIRL.—1. It is against the rules to oblige you. 2. Any expensy guide book will give the information, for which we regret we have not space.

LITTLE ORPHEAN.—1. Miss Ray's address is Avenue House, Peckham. 2. There are so many answering the description that we cannot answer without further particulars.

ROSEY.—In order to keep your hair in curl wet it occasionally with gum tragacanth. A very nice present for your lover would be a pair of slippers, a mouchoir case or a meerschaum.

A GRATEFUL ONE.—It is best to start with a good master. Prices vary very much, but for two shillings a lesson you ought to get good tuition. We cannot mention any firm in particular. There are several well-known and long established who would deal fairly by you. It would be as well to have a musical friend with you.

T. S. A.—Some people learn so much more readily than others that it is impossible to say how long it would take you to master telegraphy. We do not believe you would find a telegraph life any easier than that of a type-writer, and the trade is not as well paid and more crowded. From the description that you give of yourself we should say that you are a brunette.

PATIENCE.—The fact that the blood has not been saturated by passing through the lungs produces the blue look of our veins. The pimples which are formed on our faces when our blood is impure are supposed to be occasioned by a secretion, which finds an outlet in what was formerly called humors. Your third question causes us to remind you of the fact that the moon revolves round the earth.

C. R. C.—It is not advisable for a young student of nineteen to pay attention to any lady, and you say you do not even know this one, but fancy yourself in love with her. You must remember that beauty is only skin deep, and that the heart and mind are the things to be examined before love should be given. The best thing for you to do is to obtain some friend to introduce you to the object of your admiration. A gentleman cannot make a lady's acquaintance in any other way.

B. F. B.—The prettiest present for a young girl from a gentleman is a book of poems or a new novel, a box of gloves, candies or handkerchiefs. Music and flowers are generally very acceptable to ladies also. The book of which you speak should be obtained through your newsgiver. We cannot give business addresses. Your writing is very good for one who has never been to school; but you must only use capital letters for proper nouns.

MAUD.—We would not advise you to leave your home. A girl of your age is exposed to many temptations if she lives apart from her parents. Remember, when your trial seems heavier than you can bear, that she who bears the cross cheerfully wears the crown. Be patient and all will come right. A true friend will not think any the less of you because your house is poorly furnished, and will only love you the more if he knows the sorrow you have with your father. Certainly, write to him, if you do it with your mother's knowledge. He would probably expect to remain at your house if you invited him to come from another city.

MATHEW.—Remember the line of the old song which says

"Love is a bird that rarely comes
Again to its deserted nest."

It was a pity to quarrel. Some girls think a "lover's quarrel" gives spice and appetite to courtship, but it may be tried too often, and on the wrong man. The birthday business might work. Don't send any hackneyed common thing—all printer's ink and chromo colours. If you can't paint a cluster of heart's-ease or a leaf of olive, then gather a real flower or leaf and send it in a sheet of white or cream linen note-paper with this verse:

Come back, sweetheart.
So late I keep my watch, fair visions rise;
I seem to clasp your hands; my weary eyes
Glow unto yours unkindled with new light.
In realness of its dreams, the generous night
Has brought you back to me, and, vision-wise,
In folds me to your heart, and from your eyes
Love looks at me. Alas! so far from thee
I dream. Sweetheart, come back to me.

R. S. V. P.—The best way to remove freckles is to wash with lemon juice, cream of tartar dissolved in water or sour cream. The book you mention is not published by us.

EMMA.—The symbolical meaning of the word Misaph is, "May God keep watch between thee and me until we meet again." Literally it means a beacon or watch-tower. Your writing would do very well for book-keeping.

L. B.—In order to make your friend's hair grow where it has been miscut she must apply quinine mixed with water. That will soon have the desired effect of producing hair. Your writing is good, and indicates resolution combined with neatness.

T. L. D.—We think a cup of cold is better than hot water before breakfast. The boiling fluid is good after supper. It depends on what you eat during the day as to whether your stomach is empty or not. Fruit is said to be good in the morning, silver at noon, and lead at night.

ETHERA.—No; we would not consider a girl of twenty weighing a hundred and forty-five pounds a "fearful size;" but we should call you a brunette, and advise the use of soda for your affliction.

H. T. R.—The English language is a branch of the Teutonic language, which was spoken by the inhabitants of central Europe before the dawn of history. It is the foundation of the modern Danish, German and Dutch. It was introduced into the British Isles in the fifth century, and soon spread over the whole of England. The Celtic tongue had been the language previously used by the aboriginal people. The first Anglo-Saxon of note who composed in his own language was Bede, a monk, who died about 680. Prior to that books had been almost exclusively written in Latin.

A WINTER DANCE.

Down from the soft grey allence
Of the brooding clouds above,
Came a message swift and silent
As the first pure thought of love.

A white-robed frolicsome herald,
The first of a merry band,
Who would change in a magical moment
This earth into fairyland.

And lo, as I watched the stranger,
So daintily silvery fair,
His playmates, merrily dancing,
Came whirling through the air.

And wherever they fell in their frolic,
On tree-tops or frozen fields,
A strange white beauty lingered
Like the glimmer of fairy shields.

All through the night did these gay little sprites
Dance in bewildering whirl,
And the morning found, 'neath their twinkling feet,
A ball-room of silver and pearl.

J. B. S.

B. T. C.—Your admirer evidently thinks well of himself, and the best thing for you to do is to evince a little independence. Show him plainly that you consider other men have the same right to take you out that he has. If he really cares for you, when he thinks there is any chance of losing you, he will ask you to be his wife, if not it is better that you should not have him dancing attendance on you, as his being constantly with you will lead others to suppose you are engaged to him, and the suspicion will injure your prospects with other gentlemen. Your writing indicates individuality and refinement.

L. D. L.—In introducing a married couple you usually say "allow me to introduce Mr. and Mrs. —." Three unmarried sisters should be introduced as "the Misses —." It is not considered good form to introduce a person to each individual when there are several persons in the room. The newcomer's name is announced by the hostess as she enters, and the visitor speaks to any of the guests present with whom she is thrown in contact. At parties all people are supposed to talk to one another, as they rely on their host's discretion not to ask them to meet any but an equal in his house. Your writing and composition are excellent.

MATHEW.—To make jelly-rolls you must take one cupful of butter, two cupfuls of sugar, three cupfuls of flour and four eggs. Mix the butter and sugar together, add a cupful of sweet milk, then stir in the eggs. After mixing two teaspoonfuls of baking-powder in the flour, put that in. Bake the batter in a long, shallow pan, and when it is done spread jelly over it, and roll it while warm. To make Johnny cake, take three tablespoonfuls of sugar, one egg, one cupful of sweet milk, six tablespoonfuls of Indian meal, three tablespoonfuls of flour, in which has been previously mixed a little salt, and two teaspoonfuls of baking-powder. This makes a thin batter.

EL DORADO.—Leonidas, with three hundred Spartans, occupied the narrow pass of Thermopylae, in northern Greece, in 480 B.C., and defended it against the immense army of Xerxes, monarch of Persia, who expected to subjugate all Greece. Although the horde of Xerxes consisted of several millions, the Spartans fought with such valour that they held their enemies in check for some time, only a limited number of the Persians having the opportunity to attack them at any one moment. Only one of the Spartans survived. All the rest of the three hundred were finally slain to a man, but not until they saved much valuable time for the Grecian forces.

B. F. J.—There are persons who claim to read the character by an inspection and analysis of penmanship, but we do not pretend to vouch for the reliability of such a judgment. In no case have we stated that it is an infallible method of reading one's character.

E. C.—Apply to your newsgiver for the book. We are sorry, but we cannot give business addresses. For your chapped skin we should advise the use of glycerine and rose-water. Chemists sometimes prepare other compounds which are excellent. All that anyone can do to avoid turning grey is to thrust off trouble, and to keep a mind free from care. A little ammonia used in the water with which you bathe your hair is very healthy for it, and is said by some people to prevent greyness.

D. C.—You are all correct, in a certain sense. In the common acceptance of the terms, "work," "labour" and "toil" mean the same thing; but some writers, who are particular in such matters, do not use labour or toil when referring to man. They say a man works, a beast toils or labours; that work means human effort, guided by intelligence, and put forth to accomplish a definite object understood by the worker; whereas, toil or labour means mere animal effort, the use or significance of which it is not at all understood by the creature making it. This distinction strikes us as being "more nice than practical," and the commandment reads: "Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work."

AMY.—So you, a young girl of seventeen, think you are better able to judge the world than your parents, and you would leave the loving shelter they have provided for you in order to thrust yourself out in a blaze of unearned glory; you would put from you the flowers of love and protective care to don the bedizened crown of the stage. We cannot advise you to throw away peace for disappointment, love for detestation, contentment for bitter discontent, approbation for suspicious distrust. No. Do your duty in that state of life to which it has pleased Heaven to call you, and look with pity on your less fortunate sisters, who are called out in that world of fame, at the portals of which many weary years of waiting follow the applicant's knock for admittance.

OLD BOY.—The newspaper is a growth or evolution, not an invention, as you seem to suppose it to have been. It has come up out of and through the wants of the race, through the gradual developments forced by necessity. Most of the classic nations of antiquity appear to have had some organized systems for the transmission of important news. The Romans had excellent post-roads, and their emperors and pro-consuls sent intelligence from point to point with marvellous rapidity. But these facilities were for the patriotic order only; the poor plebeians were compelled to put up with such scraps of information as their rulers chose to impart through their special agents or by scrolls hung up in public places. In the feudal ages, "important despatches" superscribed "ride for thy life" were sent to their destinations by page or henchman, who, if he made any unnecessary delay on his journey, was likely to swing at the end of it. Even as late as the days of Charles I., the city clerks were the only "news mediums" in London. Then came the "news letters," written in the capital for the delectation of country readers, by the "rollicking gentlemen" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and so by degrees, with the help of printing, the Anglo-Saxon race at length achieved the modern newspaper.

GRACE ANN.—Your surmise that ladies in old times did not ride sideways on horseback is correct. The introduction of that style of riding in England is attributed to Anna of Bohemia, consort of Richard II. She it was (according to Stowe) that originally showed the women of that country how gracefully and conveniently they might ride on horseback sideways. Another old historian, enumerating the new fashions of Richard the Second's reign, observes: "Likewise noble ladies then used high heads, and corsets, and robes with long trains, and seats on side saddles on their horses, by the example of the respectable Queen Anna, daughter of the King of Bohemia, who first introduced the custom into the kingdom; for before, women of every rank rode as men." In the beautifully illustrative picture of Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims, to which reference is sometimes made as showing that ladies used side saddles at an earlier period, Stothard appears (according to the above quoted authorities) to have committed an anachronism in placing the most conspicuous female character of his fine composition sideways on her steed. That the lady should have been depicted riding in the male fashion, might, it strikes us, have been inferred without any historical research on the subject, from Chaucer's describing her as having on her feet "a pair of spurs-sharp."

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